

Author's Note: This chapter has been edited for spelling and any other inconsistencies I was able to spot and correct. The changes are mostly slight changes in dialogue and sentence structure, but they needed to happen so here you go.

Pairings: None currently

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//Parseltongue//

Thoughts & Mental conversations

Letters, etc.

It is hard to fight an enemy who has outposts in your head. - Sally Kempton

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Magic, End of term fifth year

"Why does he want to see us and not Harry, too?" Ron asked, tone weary. "I just want to go home and sleep for a week, y'know?"

"I know exactly what you mean," Hermione agreed, and stretched a little as her healed but aching injury pulled from activity. "Let's just find out what Professor Dumbledore wants so we can go back to the common room and rest."

"You're right, of course." Ron paused in front of the stone gargoyle and shook his head. "Did he give you the password this time?"

"Smarties," Hermione stated and stepped forward once the guardian had leapt aside. "For once he didn't make us try to figure it out ourselves. I think he knows we're all tired."

"Wonder what would've given him that bright idea?"

"Ron! Show some respect, at least." She shook her head and tried not to grin after chastising her friend. She happened to agree with him on this particular occasion.

Albus checked the map on his desk and nodded to himself when he saw the two students he was expecting. If there was one thing he could count on, it was Ron Weasley's overly impulsive and emotional nature and Hermione Granger's love of rules. They would play right into his hands as they always did.

"Come in," he called just as they got to the door.

Pushing the door open, Ron let Hermione precede him into the office, his eyes taking in the swaying, twirling and bobbling oddities that made him wonder about the older wizard's sanity. The amount of them that were obviously broken made his eyes widen in surprise.

"Hullo, Professor Dumbledore."

"Hello, my dear boy, and hello to you as well, Miss Granger. Have a seat. Tea, Lemon Drop?"

"Umm, no thank you, Professor," Hermione murmured reflexively. "You wanted to see us?" She glanced around the office with barely concealed curiosity and horror. "What happened to your office, Sir?" A blush crept up her cheeks when she realized she had blurted out the question. "Um, sorry..."

"That's quite alright, Miss Granger. It's a bit difficult to miss, don't you think? That is something I will explain to you in a moment. For now I need to impress upon the both of you how important it is that you absolutely do not owl Mr. Potter over the summer holidays." Dumbledore held up a hand to still their protests before they could even begin.

"Given the events of only a few weeks past, surely you should know that Voldemort will be after young Harry even more viciously than ever before. Owl post is not always as secure as we would like to believe and if letters or owls are intercepted or traced, then Harry's position could be compromised. For his safety, and that of your own families, please heed my request."

“But...that’ll leave him all alone with those awful muggles. And right after losing...” Ron whispered his protest.

“I will do what I can to move him to Headquarters as soon as possible, but as you can see from the state of my office, Mr. Potter is experiencing even more control issues with his temper than is usual and I feel that some time alone to think and sort himself out might be just what he needs.” Albus sighed softly, twinkle carefully subdued to convey his concern and disappointment.

“Please forward my request to your companions, as well. Now, off to your common rooms to rest before you have to pack up for the trip home.”

Hermione took one last look around the office as she stood to leave and shuddered to think about how terribly angry Harry must have been to wreak so much havoc. What happened, what was said to set him off?

“Of course, Professor.” She nodded and led Ron out, her movements a little reluctant as she lost herself in her musings. “See you September first.”

Ron waited until his best friend became more aware of her surroundings before voicing his question. Something had really gotten her to thinking and he knew better than to interrupt her before she was ready to discuss her thoughts.

“You don’t really think Harry did all that, do you?” Ron frowned intently and waited impatiently for her response.

“If something happened to push him over the edge, then yes,” the intelligent witch murmured. “He had just, and I mean just lost his Godfather and had another battle with Voldemort.” Hermione ignored Ron’s wince for the most part. “Poor Harry is probably so torn up with blaming himself as usual that he might have done all that. I’d just like to know what the trigger was.” She paused at the portrait of The Fat Lady.

“Victory,” she stated and slipped through into the common room with Ron on her heels. Finding a private spot in a quiet corner, she sat down and cast a silencing spell so they could continue to talk. “The last thing he needs right now is to be alone, even if that’s what he’s telling himself. You know he’ll try to push us away again, to protect us and all that.” She sighed. “Besides, if Owl post is so unreliable and lacking in security, then why weren’t we told this last year when Voldemort came back? If the Order is going to keep an eye on him, then why can’t they give him his mail?”

“If we can’t owl him without getting into trouble, then how are we going to keep from leaving him alone?” Ron commented. “Besides, you’re the one who called it his ‘saving people thing’.”

“I’m not really sure about getting mail to him yet. I’m trying to think of another way, but it’s a little complicated since none of us are old enough to do magic over the summer.” Hermione sighed. “I’d say the muggle post, but I’m not sure his relatives would give him the letters...”

Eyes narrowed, Ron sat back to attack the problem like the chess game it was quickly beginning to resemble. He blinked and smacked himself on the forehead when an amazingly simple and painfully obvious option occurred to him.

“We are so daft! We should have thought of this way back before third year!”

“What is it?!” Hermione sat forward eagerly.

“Who stopped Harry from getting his mail, closed the portal to platform 9 ¾ and set bludgers after him all to keep him from being hurt by You-Know-Who in second year? Who would do absolutely ANYTHING to help Harry?”

A big grin graced Hermione’s face before her expression fell.

“But it’s not right to use a house elf like that...”

“So we ask him if he’s willing to help us. If he says he can’t, then we’ll try something else, okay?”

“Okay...” Agreeing reluctantly, Hermione sat back to see what Dobby would say.

“Hey, Dobby!” Ron called out quietly and looked around to make sure no one was paying them anymore attention than usual.

“Silencing spell, Ron,” Hermione reminded him with a grin.

“Oh. Yeah.” Ron shrugged and grinned back despite his light blush.

A soft ‘pop’ signalled the arrival of one very hyper and easily excitable house elf. He bounced a little and smiled, large pale green eyes focused on Ron.

“Yes Mr. Wheezy?”

Hermione sniggered and straightened Dobby’s hat affectionately. He still took and wore everything she knitted and left in the common room.

“Hi, Dobby.”

“Hellos to yous toos, Miss Grangers.” Dobby’s grin widened. “How can Dobby be helping yous?”

“We need your help with Harry. Shhhh! He’s okay! Relax,” Ron muttered to calm the suddenly distraught elf. They might have a privacy spell up but if he got to bouncing around too much people were sure to get curious when they couldn’t hear him. “Professor Dumbledore won’t let us owl Harry this summer and we’re worried about him being all alone.”

“Would you be able to help us get letters to Harry without getting yourself in trouble? We know how much you love Harry,” Hermione stated.

“Dobby is happy to be helping yous help Harry Potter. Dobby will help Harry Potter to the day hims die,” he declared vehemently, then stilled as he sensed the approach of said young wizard. Collapsing Hermione’s silencing spell, the little elf turned a surprisingly stern gaze in the young teen’s direction. “Harry Potter, sir! Yous did not eat today,” Dobby scolded gently. “Dobby is getting yous some dinner now.”

Harry wandered over to see what Ron, Hermione and Dobby were talking about and smiled at the house elf’s immediately protective statement. He almost protested until he saw the hopeful look on Dobby and Hermione’s faces.

“Thank you, Dobby. Why don’t you bring something for all three of us, if it’s not too much trouble?”

Dobby simply nodded and vanished with another soft ‘pop’.

Ron took in how sad and broken his best friend looked and fought the urge to hug him like his mom always did when someone was upset.

“The absolute last thing you need is to be left all alone right now, mate. Being alone when people you love die is the worst place to be.”

“So everyone tells me,” Harry mused. “But why shouldn’t I be alone? I have the best friends in the whole world and I did a bloody good job of nearly getting all of you killed by falling for a stupid...”

“We went willingly, Harry James Potter! You didn’t force us to do anything. You’re not the first person to be fooled by Voldemort and you won’t be the last,” Hermione ranted and directed Harry to the third seat in ‘their’ area with an almost imperiously pointed finger. “So get it out of your head that everyone that dies because of something Voldemort does is your fault! It’s not your fault. And don’t even think of pushing us all away to protect us. You will not be alone this summer.”

Taken aback by the bushy haired girl’s direct statement, Harry blinked, sat down as her gesture had silently ordered and nodded his

mute agreement. It wouldn't do him any good to argue with her when she was that sure of herself, anyway.

"Thank you," Harry whispered. "Really, I needed to hear that, but I just got back from talking to Dumbledore..."

"And he told you no owls, right?" Ron growled. "It's just bloody stupid, mate, the idea that owl post isn't safe. Besides, 'Mione and me, our families, we were all in danger before we met you, and all because of who we are. We'll come up with some way to get around the no mail, no owl thing."

"Yeah, well, he said he'd try to have me out at least for my birthday, but I'm not gonna hold my breath or anything," Harry commented despondently. "I hate going to live with those...muggles."

Dobby arrived with the requested meals and hung around to watch the Golden Trio interact until Harry finally ghosted off to bed. He knew there was something wrong with his wizard friend and he would do anything to help him heal whatever was damaged.

"Yous will be okay, Harry Potter. Dobby will help you," he vowed and a flash of magic sealed the vow as soon as he finished speaking it. He turned his head and nodded to Ron and Hermione. "Harry Potter is the greatest wizard of the Age. Dobby will helps you help him."

"Thank you so much, Dobby." Hermione hugged the small creature gently and wandered off to her own bed.

"You're the best, Dobby. Come see me tomorrow evening, okay? That way he'll get letters his first day home and he'll know we're serious." Ron headed to bed with a lighter heart than he'd had since the battle in the Department of Mysteries.

Discounting the rather amusing fracas between a handful of DA members and Malfoy and his two goons, the ride home on the train was the usual blur of snacks, conversation and games until it came time to gather their things and disembark. All Harry wanted to do was wait until everyone left and ride the train back to Hogwarts. Maybe then he'd have a good summer. He snorted derisively. Most likely not,

considering the fact that Snape lived at the castle year round. Despite his reluctance, he took up Hedwig's cage and dragged his trunk from the train.

Stepping through the gateway between platforms nine and ten, Harry found a surprise waiting for him on the other side. Scarred and sinister Mad-Eye Moody stood waiting with his staff in hand. Hot pink hair gave away Tonks's presence as she urged a pale and greying Remus Lupin up to where he, too, was clearly visible to Harry. At the very front stood Molly and Arthur in their best impression of muggle clothing and Fred and George in what appeared to be neon green dragon hide.

"Ron, Ginny!" called Mrs. Weasley, hurrying forwards and hugging her children tightly. "Harry, dear — how are you?"

"I'm fine," lied Harry, as he submitted himself to her tight embrace. Over her shoulder he saw Ron goggling at the twins' new clothes.

"What are they supposed to be?" Ron asked, pointing at the jackets.

"Finest dragonhide, little bro'," said Fred, giving the zip on his jacket a little tweak. "Business is booming and we have an image to maintain."

"Hello, Harry," Remus murmured when Mrs Weasley finally let go of Harry and turned to greet the rest of her extended brood.

"Professor," said Harry. "I didn't expect . . . why are all of you here?"

"Well," said Remus with a conspiratorial smile, "we thought we might have a little chat with your Aunt and Uncle before we let them take you home." He studied the boy in front of him and was painfully disturbed by the dark emotions and rage he saw swirling behind his Cub's Avada Kedavra green eyes. The things he was seeing weren't healthy and he felt at a loss as to how to fix the problem without making a huge fuss that might well only make things worse than they already were.

"I don't know if that's a good idea," said Harry at once. "It's not like anyone has ever paid any attention to what they do to me or what I

say about what it's like living with them, anyway and you know how they are about being bothered by 'Freaks'. This is just going to make things worse for me."

"Oh, but I think it's a wonderful idea to put a little fear of consequences into their closed off little brains," growled Moody, who had limped close enough to take part in their quiet conversation. "That'll be them, will it, Potter?" He nodded over his shoulder to indicate the trio of muggles.

Harry peered over the retired auror's shoulder and growled under his breath when he caught sight of the Dursleys, who looked equal parts appalled and terrified by Harry's reception committee. Hanging back to watch the 'show', he felt a deep hatred well up in his chest and was oblivious to just how utterly frightening his appearance was at that moment.

"Good afternoon," said Mr Weasley pleasantly to Vernon as he came to a halt right in front of him. "You might remember me. My name is Arthur Weasley."

Remembering how this red-haired freak had almost single-handedly destroyed his living room a few years prior, Vernon turned a deeper shade of puce and glared viciously at the gathered wizards. He ignored Petunia's embarrassed and frightened discomfort and Dudley's attempts at invisibility and drew himself up stiffly.

"We thought we'd just have a few words with you about Harry," said Mr Weasley, still smiling.

"Yeah," growled Moody. "About how he's treated when he's at your place. About what that young man has been through over the last couple of years. About how dangerous it could be for you and yours to push him too far this summer."

Vernon's moustache seemed to bristle with indignation. Perhaps the bowler hat gave him the entirely mistaken impression that he was dealing with a kindred spirit because he addressed himself to Moody.

"I am not aware that it is any of your business what goes on in my house! "

"I expect that what you're not aware of would fill several dozen books, Dursley. Look at him, you idiot muggle! Look at that young man and don't even try to tell me he doesn't scare you," growled Moody. "It would be in your best interests to leave him alone if you want to have a nice, quiet, normal summer."

"That really isn't the point," interjected Tonks, whose pink hair seemed to offend Petunia more than all the rest put together, for the thin, pinched older woman closed her eyes rather than look at the vivacious young Auror. "The point is, if we find out you've been horrible to Harry again..."

"And make no mistake, we will hear about it," added Remus pleasantly.

"Yes," said Mr. Weasley, "even if you won't let Harry use the felly-tone..."

"Telephone" hissed Hermione.

"Yeah, if we get any hint that Potter's been mistreated in any way, you'll have us to answer to after he gets done with you," stated the grizzled ex-Auror.

Vernon swelled ominously. The very thought that that wretched little freak would so much as dare to raise that stick of his towards his family was a preposterous allegation. His sense of outrage seemed to outweigh even his fear of this bunch of odd looking goofballs and urged to take a step forward to prove how unafraid he was.

"Are you threatening me, sir?" he said, so loudly that passers-by actually turned to stare.

"If it would get your damned attention, then yes, I would do a lot more than threaten you, but in all actuality, no one is threatening you. If that boy doesn't live with you during the summer until he is seventeen years old, then the wards on your house that protect you, your family

and Harry will fail,” said Mad-Eye, who seemed rather hopeful that Vernon would grasp this fact quickly.

“And if those wards fail, then the evil bastards who want him dead will come knocking on your door and they won’t leave any of you alive. Do you understand me, Dursley?”

“Do I look like the kind of man who can be intimidated? Who could be in any way be intimidated by that scrap of a freakish boy?” barked Vernon. He turned to glower at the afore mentioned teen and went white as a sheet as glowing, icy cold green eyes glared back at him with more venomous hate than he could recall ever having seen directed at anyone in his life.

“Well . . .” said Moody, pushing back his bowler hat to reveal his sinisterly revolving magical eye. Vernon leapt backwards in horror and collided painfully with a luggage trolley. “Yes, I’d have to say you do, Dursley.”

He turned away from Vernon to survey Harry, a barely noticeable shudder of discomfort racking his body when he caught sight of the boy’s feral visage. Composing himself, he resettled his bowler hat and strode over to look down at the angry teenager.

“So, Potter . . . send us an owl if you need us. If we don’t hear from you for three days in a row, we’ll send someone along . . .”

Petunia whimpered piteously. It could not have been plainer that she was thinking of what the neighbours would say if they caught sight of these people marching up the garden path.

“Bye, then, Potter,” said Moody, grasping Harry’s shoulder for a moment with a gnarled hand.

“Take care, Harry,” Remus murmured quietly. “Write if you have any problems or if you just need someone to talk to.”

“Harry, we’ll have you away from there as soon as we can,” Mrs. Weasley whispered, hugging him again.

“We’ll see you as soon as we can, mate,” said Ron anxiously, shaking Harry’s hand.

“Really soon, Harry,” said Hermione earnestly and hugged him tightly despite how stiffly he stood in her embrace. Her friend was suffering in his usual silence and she was determined to break him free of it. “We promise.”

Harry nodded stiffly, bursts of memories and emotions that made no sense to him fuelling his chilling demeanour. He couldn’t find the words to tell them what it meant to him, to see them all ranged there, on his side. Instead, he smiled crookedly, raised a hand in farewell, turned around and led the way out of the station towards the sunlit street, with Vernon, Petunia and Dudley hurrying along in his wake.

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Albus Dumbledore was not a happy wizard. A substantial amount of his tracking devices had been permanently damaged and outright resisted his every effort to repair them despite employing every perceivable method of repair. The fact that such a young wizard’s power could defy his own clearly superior and far better trained magical ability only served to add further fuel his ire.

“Spend your holiday with your family, alone, hungry and isolated and we’ll see if you aren’t a bit better mannered when you’re ‘rescued’ a week before school starts, you little brat.”

Pulling out a sheet of parchment, he penned a letter to the Dursleys and gloated privately to himself over his spark of genius. “Your parents never gave me this much trouble. I really wonder where you got such a stubborn streak. Your grandparents, perhaps. James and Lily were such sweet, mouldable children. Why couldn’t you be more like them?”

A snort from the shelf behind him drew his attention to the worn and rumpled old Sorting Hat. Arching a bushy grey eyebrow at the magical artefact, he frowned.

“What are you snorting about, Alistor?”

Disturbed and more than a little put off by the arrogance of the school's current headmaster, the Sorting Hat listened to the man ramble on and filed it all away for future reference. It was looking more and more like he and the young Potter Heir needed to have a heart to heart discussion.

"What, exactly, do you think to accomplish by abusing the Chosen child?"

"I know what I am doing, especially in regards to Mr. Potter. He is our one weapon against Voldemort and I intend to see him hardened and ready for the task that awaits him. I made the mistake of caring too much for him in the past and look how he has repaid me. He runs off without consulting me and destroys my belongings..."

"Funny how the main things that broke are devices you set to track his progress," the Hat interrupted with an amused sound. "Poor Albus can scarcely tell anything about the boy now." He laughed raucously when the elderly wizard sent an angry look in his direction.

"These items are but a mere pittance, a pittance I will see taken out of his hide if I can manage it discretely enough," Albus declared with quiet confidence.

"Events have a way of going in the Chosen child's favour," Alistor countered. "Have a care that you do not under-estimate him as badly as you clearly over-estimate your own importance in current events."

Little Whinging, #4 Privet Drive

The ride home from King's Cross Station was, if possible, more tense and strained than normal. Harry drifted in between angry, hate-filled lucidity and a calm, quiet void that reminded him suspiciously of the Imperious curse; memories that sickened him warred with love filled recollections of his brief time with his parents as years old spells fell apart in his mind. A whimper from the other side of the car drew his attention to Dudley and he took an inordinate amount of satisfaction from the larger boy's fearful reactions.

“Don’t worry ickle Dudderkins. The big bad wizard won’t hex you unless you give me a really good reason,” he whispered and returned his attention to vacantly gazing out the side window. The sheer normality of Little Whinging sickened a part of him and he wasn’t sure why – it had never bothered him this much before. Arriving at Number Four Privet Drive, he dragged his things up to the smallest bedroom and closed the door on the world.

Sitting on his bed later on in the evening of his first night back at Number Four Privet Drive, Harry thumbed through his text books and shook his head, face showing a clear expression of disgust. He could kick himself for not paying more attention in class, for not working harder on everything in general. Not only might he have avoided some problems with Voldemort, but he might also still have Sirius. He really wasn’t sure if studying Transfiguration or Charms any more closely would have made a difference in Cedric’s survival, but he had to consider the possibility. A quiet voice made comment on his train of thought.

No, being more studious most probably would not have helped Cedric, but listening to your Slytherin side a bit more might have saved you a lot of grief right long with saving your Godfather.

Harry blinked in surprise. The voice was vaguely familiar and, unfortunately, made a lot of sense. His ‘Slytherin side’ as he had always called it, was generally less trusting and far more likely to look out for his own best interests before it took another’s needs into account. It was the self-same set of instincts that had kept him alive so far.

Yeah, my Slytherin side, he mused. So, not only is it my fault for not listening to ‘Mione when she tried to tell me it was a trap...it’s my own bloody fault for not listening to my self. Sirius...I’m so sorry... That nagging, familiar voice broke into his thoughts before he had a chance to really wallow in his grief and feelings of guilty responsibility.

Oh, get over yourself already. There is no one to fault when another person dies except those directly involved in the event. You didn’t control Sirius Black any more than you could have controlled that insane house elf, Kreacher.

Harry suddenly started to feel nervous. Since when did his inner voice answer him? Since when did it give advice in such a direct manner? Wasn't it Hermione who had commented that, even in the wizarding world, it was considered very bad to be hearing voices?

He dropped that particular train of thought and made a concerted effort to get back to his studies. Maybe, just maybe, he could focus on the books deeply enough to dream of homework instead of everything else that was likely to plague his nightmares.

A soft 'pop' disturbed him from his reading a few hours later, and to his surprise, there stood Dobby with a heaping tray of food and what appeared to be several letters.

"Dobby?"

"Yes, Harry Potter, sir. Dobby has brought your favourite dinner and letters from your family."

Stomach rumbling the instant he smelled good, hot food, Harry stretched and accepted the proffered tray.

"Thank you, but...why are you here, Dobby? Won't you get into trouble for leaving Hogwarts or something?"

"Dobby is appreciating you being worried, Harry Potter, sir, but Dobby is not bonded to anyone at Hogwarts, so he is going wherever Dobby pleases to." The little elf smiled. "Your Wheezy and Granger is worried about you, so they are asking Dobby to bring you letters and food. Dobby is also taking your letters to your friends. Dobby would do anything for Harry Potter."

Stunned to the point of tears by the display of loyalty and love by all involved, Harry sniffled quietly and wiped at his face. Taking a deep breath, he composed himself and gave the elf a brilliantly happy smile.

"So, that's what you three were talking about the other night, huh? This is brilliant! Thank you, Dobby. If you ever need a place to stay, you are always welcome with me," he stated, unaware of the direct

implications his words might have for the small elf. “Do you mind staying for a while, or at least until I read my letters and write my replies? Or do you need to go soon?”

Speechless, the house elf took a long moment to process what the young wizard had just said before finally replying. Stuttering a bit, he finally got the words to come out coherently.

“Dobby...is st-staying until yours replies is ready,” he managed. A few minutes later, he brought up the more personally important subject. “Is yours meaning it, Harry Potter, sir? Can Dobby stay with you and your family?”

Pausing with his fork half way between his mouth and the plate, Harry replayed what Dobby had just asked and realized his offer must have had greater significance than anything he had originally anticipated.

“Yes, I did mean it when I said you could stay with me, but what exactly does that mean to you? I don’t want to say the wrong thing, or something.”

“If Harry Potter will have him, Dobby is wanting to bond to the Potter family, to serve you as your house elf,” Dobby explained.

“I thought you liked being free...”

“Dobby is liking being free of the Bad Master and is liking working Hogwarts, but no House elf can be at their best without bonding to a Wizard. House Elf magic is strengthened by the bond, so we are better able to help our Masters.”

Considering the likelihood that Hermione would kill him the instant she found out that he had bonded a house elf, then the hopeful – no, eager – look on Dobby’s face, Harry realized he liked the thought of making his friend happy. After all, Dobby was as much family to him as the rest of his friends.

“I will agree to take you on as my house elf, bonded to the Potter line, so long as you agree to my conditions.”

Dobby nodded quietly, his large eyes full of nervous fears.

“Whatever yous is wanting of Dobby, Harry Potter, sir.”

“Alright, then. You will not call me Master unless the situation is one that requires it. You will be paid ten galleons a week, to do with as you please and you will wear whatever clothes you wish. Once I have a house, I may come up with a uniform, but I haven’t thought too clearly about that.” Harry grinned.

“And lastly, my giving you clothes to wear is not a sign of freedom. You and I must agree to you being freed before it can occur. Do you agree?”

“Oh, yes, Dobby is agreeing, Harry Potter, sir!” Dobby bounced around happily before settling back down near Harry. “Do yous know the bonding spell?”

“No. What do I need to do?”

A spike of magic set off detectors at the ministry of magic and in the – currently empty – office of one Albus Dumbledore. Analysis of the spike by the Office of Underage Magic concluded that it was a harmless venting of energy resulting in no noticeable effect and no further action was taken.

Dobby shivered as the young wizard’s magic reached out and tied itself to him, the resulting rush of power enough to knock him to his knees. Blinking euphorically, he giggled and hugged his new Master around the waist. The bond practically pulsed between them and he was overjoyed by the happy, contented smile on Harry’s face. Taking the chance to get a feel for his Master’s magical signature while he was relaxed and unguarded, Dobby’s eyes went even wider than normal and he stifled a gasp. He waited for the young wizard to open his eyes before speaking.

“Yous is much more powerful already than my old Master was when you freed me,” he whispered. “And soon yous will start to grow up as a wizard, growing into yous full power. Dobby is making sure yous is eating enough to keep up yous strength.”

"What exactly do you mean by 'growing up as a wizard'?" Harry asked, eyes still aglow with his own giddy reaction to the powerful bonding. "I don't think I've heard anything about that...unless you mean puberty..."

"Harry Potter is not knowing? This is for your magic more than your body. Dobby will help. You need books to learn as you grow in power," the elf stated seriously.

"If I send you to Gringotts, can you get money out of my vault?"

"Do you have your key?"

"I think Molly Weasley has it. I can write her a note so she'll hand it over," Harry mused. "Just in case Dumbledore has it, I'll write a separate letter for Gringotts so they know to make me a new key or to retrieve the old one." He sighed. "But we can do it in the morning. It's too late to bother Molly tonight. I'll finish eating and read my letters so the replies are ready tomorrow."

Dobby nodded and smiled.

"Just make Dobby a list of books you think you might be wanting and Dobby will get you what else you need too."

Harry pulled a roll of parchment over next to him along with his quill and ink, then opened up his letters and started to read. Alternately smiling, laughing and feeling outright depressed, Harry wondered when he'd ever get off this rollercoaster ride he called his emotions. Ever since Cedric's death a little over a year ago, he would wobble between enjoying life and feeling flat out ready to beg for mercy in the form of a well aimed Avada Kedavra, and losing Sirius was only making it worse.

Surprised by the letters from Luna and Neville, he settled in to answer as best he could. If there was one thing he knew his friends would not allow him to get away with, it was his usual evasive 'I'm fine', and that knowledge filled him with a deeper sense of family than he had felt for most of his life.

With his letters folded and addressed to the appropriate recipient, Harry began a list of book subjects he wanted Dobby to find for him.

Please look for books on the following subjects. Thank you.

Occlumency Legilimency Defence Against the Dark Arts

Wizarding Law Wandless Magic Wand Making

And anything you know for certain a young wizard would have learned from his parents or tutors before going to Hogwarts.

Looking over everything one last time, he decided that he might as well go to bed. It was after midnight already and Dobby would be back in the morning to take his letters and to bring him his breakfast. Changing into his sleep pants, he crawled into bed and sighed. It had turned out to be a far better day than he could have hoped and that good feeling carried over into his hope for the coming months. Sleep dragged him under and he immediately recognized that he was in a dream.

"No, not again," Harry breathed as he once again materialized into a dream of the events that led up to and immediately followed his Godfather's death. Standing near the security desk, he was shocked when another version of himself led his five companions towards the lifts after throwing a concerned and very suspicious look at the unattended desk. Drawn to follow as if in a Pensive Memory, the young man observed as an outsider and his blood ran cold.

He watched himself trying in vain to send the youngest pair away to safety, and his attempts to protect them all...all in vain. Their loyalty and stubbornness rivalled his own, or so it would seem.

The plain black door he'd dreamed of for months appeared before them and he groaned. "No guys..."

"Let's go."

He watched Luna looking around with open mouthed awe...took in Ginny, Ron and Neville's defiant loyalty...they made their way through the round room of doors...and then...

"This is it!" he cried.

Harry didn't think he would never be able to forget the dancing, diamond-sparkling light that filled the room behind the door that led to the prophecies.

"This way!"

Drawn along despite his lack of desire to relive these events, he followed his dream self and friends along as they made their cautious way to row ninety-seven, hearts pumping furiously in the silence. Sirius was no where to be seen...and then the Death Eaters came...

Black shapes emerged out of thin air all around them, blocking their obvious routes of escape; familiar eyes glinted at them through eye slits in white masks and a dozen wands were pointing directly at their hearts. The scene abruptly shifted to the Veil room and Harry moaned softly even as he was forced to observe the events as they played out before him in stark detail.

He watched the fighting, the way Bellatrix taunted and tortured Neville and himself, then the arrival of Sirius, Lupin, Moody, Tonks and Kingsley. They had come in time to be of some help...but in a detached sort of way, he wondered where Dumbledore was. Why wasn't he down here helping them fight, helping them protect the prophecy?

"Harry, take the prophecy, grab Neville and run!" Sirius yelled, dashing to meet Bellatrix.

"Harry, round up the others and GO!"

"Dumbledore!" said Neville, his sweaty face suddenly transformed by relief, staring over Harry's shoulder.

"What?"

“DUBBLEDORE!”

Watching himself turn to look where Neville was staring, he saw what held the other boy's rapt attention. Directly above them, framed in the doorway from the Brain Room, stood Albus Dumbledore, his wand aloft, his face white and furious. He remembered feeling a kind of electric charge surge through every particle of his body, then the jubilant thought — He came to save us!

Harry shook his head. Something wasn't right about this feeling that flared when they saw Dumbledore finally coming to the rescue...it felt too...contrived...Why did he feel an almost worshipful trust when he looked at Dumbledore at that moment? All he felt now was a deep sense of betrayal that he couldn't explain any better than the previous sense of unconditional trust.

Only one pair was still battling, apparently unaware of the new arrival. Harry saw Sirius duck Bellatrix's jet of red light: he was laughing at her.

Why were you laughing, Sirius? Why did you have to taunt her and play her game instead of finishing it and taunting the corpse...it would have been so much better for all of us if you had...Then I wouldn't have had to watch the needless death of the only father figure I've ever known...

The second jet of red light hit Sirius squarely on the chest. The laughter had not quite died from his face as his eyes widened with shock. It seemed to take Sirius an age to fall: his body curved in a graceful arc as he sank backwards through the ragged veil hanging from the arch. There was a look of mingled fear and surprise on Sirius' wasted, once-handsome face as he fell through the ancient doorway and disappeared behind the veil, which fluttered for a moment as though in a high wind, then fell back into place.

“Sirius,” Harry breathed, chest aching with the pain of seeing this again and the even more painful knowledge that Sirius' arrogance had contributed somewhat to his own demise. As much as he wanted to take full responsibility for the older man's death, he realized he

couldn't. There were many to blame for that fateful event, and if he were to be honest with himself, Dumbledore had kept him as strictly imprisoned at Grimmauld Place as any of the guards at Azkaban. That enforced isolation in and of itself would have contributed to Sirius' rebellion. Something else about that part of the memory bothered him, but he couldn't quite put his finger on the specific detail.

He heard a loud noise from behind the dais that signalled Bellatrix's flight from the veil room and was jerked along after his dream self until they once again stood in the atrium of the ministry of magic.

"Come out, come out, little Harry!" Bellatrix called in her mocking baby voice.

Harry growled at the scene that was playing out before him. He smirked in a self-deprecating way when he saw Bellatrix go down ever so briefly under his weak and ineffective Crucio, his first Unforgivable curse. He knew deep down that he could do much better, and would very likely do so if he ever faced her again.

"Potter, I'm going to give you one chance!" shouted Bellatrix. "Give me the prophecy — roll it out towards me now — and I may spare your life!"

"Well, you're going to have to kill me, because it's gone!" Harry roared and, as he shouted it, pain seared across his forehead; his scar was on fire again, and he felt a surge of fury that was quite unconnected with his own. "And he knows!" crowed Harry, with a laugh mad enough to match Bellatrix's own. "Your dear old mate Voldemort knows it's gone, too! He's not going to be happy with you, is he?"

Harry felt no pain from his position as an observer and wondered about it for a long moment as he focused on his arch-nemesis, who was currently looking down his wand at Dream-Harry. Then Dumbledore appeared and the hate the two wizards felt for each other was almost tangible, a living thing that hissed and screamed between the two rivals.

Watching the two veteran duellists was a thing of fierce beauty for Harry as spells of every colour were sent racing back and forth, the blazing pace such that he could barely follow what they were casting when he actually recognized the spells. He memorized every wand movement and wandless gesture, every sizzling trail of spell energy, every insult and scene of destruction. The moment Voldemort vanished, Harry's point of view shifted to what was going on inside his own head during his brief possession by Voldemort.

Looking around, he admired the dark serenity of the Chamber he found himself in. The walls were a deep Slytherin green and the accents were in silver and a complimentary shade of blue, the sparse furnishing richly made from dark woods and heavy fabrics. He focused on a mess of discoloured areas on the walls and floor, then noted some other things that disturbed him in ways he couldn't rightly explain.

"What are all of these strange patches and chains...what is this mess on the floor?" He wondered, thoughts becoming more confused and disjointed the closer he got to the worst concentrations of the out of place discolouration. It was at that moment that he heard a familiar chuckle that focused him on a young looking Tom Riddle; he froze, uncertain whether he should attack or wait.

//Tom. What's going on?// he hissed demandingly.

//Given the chance, you really are quite the observant young man, Harry. You were able to see it all through mostly unclouded eyes and I truly did not expect you to get it on the first try,// Voldemort mused and gave Harry a slight nod of respect. //These oddly discoloured places on the walls are a representation of spells that have been cast on your mind, your metaphysical home. These are spells designed to cover up things someone doesn't want you to know, like a bad paint job, I suppose. They're designed to keep you from thinking for yourself and acting on your own desires. They keep you from being who you were born to be.//

//Oh, and what would that be, hmmm, Tom? What do you think I was born to be?//

//I don't have to think, Harry. I know that you were born to be one of the most powerful wizards our world has ever known. I know it, else I would never have marked you as my equal. Dumbledore knows it, and that's why he has kept you from knowing who you are and what you can truly become. Even your little band of friends can feel it. Why else would they follow you into the unknown with such blind trust?//
Voldemort shook his head and chuckled quietly. //Deep down, I think you know it, too. I doubt that your power will allow itself to remain leashed for much longer. Work hard to break free, my young Serpent. I am so looking forward to facing you when we are truly on equal footing. Until then, sleep well...//

Harry felt a jolt as if he had been falling from a great height and his feet had suddenly hit solid ground, waking him abruptly.

“Never interrupt your enemy when he is making a mistake.” - Napoleon Bonaparte

July 2nd, #4 Privet Drive

Harry felt a jolt as if he had been falling from a great height and his feet had suddenly hit solid ground, waking him abruptly. Fumbling for his glasses, he rubbed at his scar reflexively and was pleasantly and warily surprised to find that it only ached a little instead of burning with pain like he would have expected given the majority of his past encounters with Voldemort.

“Half past three...this is ridiculous,” he muttered and shuffled over to his rickety desk to pen a quick note to Hermione about his dream. It was odd enough to think that Voldemort might have actually given him some useful information. An attempt to understand the infinite number of reasons why the Dark Lord might have done so when he still too fuzzy headed from lack of sleep to focus beyond getting back into his nice warm bed was giving him a headache, so he decided it might be best to ignore that line of thought until such time as it became an important issue.

Placing the letter with the pile he had left on his desk for Dobby to deliver the next morning, he went back to his bed, thoughts calmer now that he had arranged to discuss the dream with someone.

“Maybe this time I’ll actually get some sleep...” he breathed and was asleep before his head had fully settled on his pillow.

July 2nd, The Burrow

Hermione opened her letters from Harry with a pleased smile. The first was simply an expression of appreciation for her letter, and a promise to write more often. She hadn’t expected any more than that – it was only the first full day of vacation, after all. Opening the second letter, she paled a little and continued reading, a glimmer of excitement growing to fill her gaze as the thrill of a new, potentially challenging puzzle fuelled her enthusiasm.

‘Mione,

I just woke up from the strangest dream I've ever had. I don't think it had anything to do with a plan or an attack. If it did, I can't figure out how it possibly could have. It was about that night and everything that happened after I ran off, but I felt like I was watching it in a Pensive. It was strange to be dragged along, watching myself yet held apart from feeling any of the emotions that I know were choking me to death by the time the fighting really got started. Once it got to where Voldemort possessed me in the atrium, I was in a room alone with him. The room felt...it feels like it's there, inside of me and all I had to do was find it. I know that sounds nutters, but...that's how it feels.

It was such a beautiful place, 'Mione. I would show it to you if I could. The walls were dark green and blue stone and all of the trim stuff was silver. It would have been perfect if it weren't for all the discoloured patches on the walls and windows and the chains on the doors. Only one door was open a little, and I think that's the one that leads to Voldemort. I really think this room is in my head.

Voldemort, or at least I think it was Voldemort, told me that those patches and chains were spells to hide memories and spells to keep me from really using my magic. The beautiful pool of light in the floor drew me...I just wanted to sink into it and relax for once, but I couldn't because too much of it was bricked over. The opening was so small. Seeing that hurt more than anything else that's been done to me so far...hell, this time my scar didn't even hurt.

Dobby is going to pick up some books for me, so I'll be looking into the subject myself, but I would really appreciate your help with this. Could you talk to the rest of the group about looking into this as well? I am curious if Voldemort told me the truth, or if this is just another elaborate trick. If he is telling me the truth, then I'll worry about what that means when it becomes an issue. I figure, between the six of us, we might dig up some ideas on this, and maybe even get some ideas for things to teach to the DA, too.

Send Dobby if you have questions or need me for something. Happy Hunting.

Harry

Reading the letter through twice more, Hermione shook her head and chewed on her lower lip while she considered her plan of action.

“Oh, Harry, what have you gotten yourself into now?” Making plans for a visit to Flourish & Botts and possibly even the wizarding library in London, she contemplated how to convince Mrs. Weasley to allow a trip to Diagon Alley. “Is the room actually in his head or is it a figment created by Voldemort? Ron!!”

“What?! I’m right here!”

“Oh, I thought you were upstairs. When do you go to the Healer again?”

Amused by his friend’s distracted air and knowing it could only mean she was working on a problem, Ron grinned tolerantly.

“Tomorrow. Why?”

“Read this. I need you to ask your Mind Healer about the room and stuff so we can find out if it’s normal for wizards to have a room like that in their heads, or if this is just another slimy trick of Voldemort’s.”

Scanning through, Ron frowned and re-read it to make sure he had the gist of it. He shuddered at the mention of the door that led to Voldemort’s mind. That bothered him more than the idea of talking to the Dark Lord.

“Bloody Hell, Hermione! Snake face just won’t ease up on Harry, will he?” Sighing his exasperation, he nodded agreeably. “I’m sorry you’re missing the trip to Greece with your Parents, but I sure am glad they let you spend the summer here with us. When things like this happen to Harry, you’re usually the one to figure out what’s causing it.”

Hermione blushed lightly and shrugged as if to say it wasn’t anything important.

“I just told Mom and Dad the truth. I’m sixteen and I want to enjoy a summer with my friends. Telling them about how badly off Harry was,

what with losing Sirius and all, just softened them up about it even more. So, you'll talk to your Healer for me?"

"Yeah, I'll ask Healer Monroe. It'll make him feel useful for once, I guess. He still can't figure out what exactly that brain thingy was trying to do to me." The ginger-haired boy shivered.

"Is it always the same imagery, or does it change from time to time?" Stroking the scars on one of Ron's forearms, Hermione couldn't help but admire the scroll and knot work-like patterns the creature's tentacles had left behind. The shiny pink scars were slowly darkening to a café au lait shade of brown, and the beauty of their appearance belied the agony that Ron had suffered while wrapped up in the creature's grip.

"Oh, no...what I see changes all the time. It's like a chess game and knowing so many moves ahead, but this isn't chess. Those things, they don't perceive the world like we do; they see infinite possibilities branching from every choice. Thank Merlin what that thing shoved in my head isn't like that, not exactly. It's bad enough as it is, though. My head hurts so bad sometimes when there are too many options. It feels like my head is going to explode, like my head can't hold all of it at one time..." Shaking himself out of that train of thought, Ron sighed and gently pulled his arm away from his friend's inquisitive touch before rubbing his arms vigorously.

"Um, try talking to Bill about that room thingy, maybe Neville, too. His Gran may have told him some old pureblood traditions or history that Dad wouldn't have shared with us younger kids. Hell, try Luna. I never know what's going on in that girl's head."

"Thanks, Ron." Hugging her friend fiercely, Hermione smiled and kissed him on the cheek just to see him blush. "I'll send them a copy of Harry's letter with Dobby and I'll try to get out to Diagon Alley as soon as I can manage it so I can look for any books that might be helpful. Maybe Bill will go with me..."

"Have fun." Ron grinned despite his red ears and pink cheeks. "Better you than me when it comes to all that book stuff."

July 2nd, Meeting of the Werewolf Tribes, A remote area in Ireland

Opening the door to the small cabin he was staying in, Remus looked around the vicinity immediately outside and growled under his breath. His amber eyes took in the movements of his fellow werewolves with an air of critical assessment until they landed on an older, grizzled man dressed in navy blue robes. Smiling warmly, he straightened his own richly made dark blue robes and strode out to meet the other man.

“Gregor, how are you this evening?”

“No worse for wear, Remus. You look angry at the world this evening. What’s wrong?” Pale blue eyes studied the man who walked so proudly at his side and saw a tiredness that did not stem from the previous night’s transformation.

“Dumbledore,” Remus growled. He walked at the older werewolf’s side, jaw set in a clear expression of disgust and more than a little sadness. “I received an owl from him just after dawn.”

“Did he have any success with the new legislation?”

“No.” Looking down at the leader of the werewolf Council, Remus shook his head. “Why does he keep sending me out here, Gregor? I tire of the charade I am forced to play to keep my fellow wizards from fearing me.”

“It allows you to have Dumbledore’s ear, does it not, Brother? He carries your suggestions for legislation before the Wizgamot, does he not?” The blue eyed werewolf sighed. “You are one of the strongest voices on the Council and one of the most socially connected; it is not well for you to be so disheartened about our chances.”

Entering the clearing that had been set aside for the use of the Council, Gregor gestured for Remus to take a seat across from him, and then seated himself, steepled fingers tapping his chin thoughtfully. “Are you truly that disillusioned by recent events?”

Settling himself with an almost regal grace, Remus wrapped his robes around himself and sighed expansively. His amber eyes searched his elder's while he formulated a reply. This was not an easy topic for him anymore, not with the way his Wolf argued with his human side over things he had always taken for granted.

"Disillusioned," he mused, a growl rumbling in his chest once more. "Albus keeps sending me out into the wilds in a desperate bid for the support of the wizarding werewolves. For all his wisdom, he has never actually looked at our society and realized that we are far more than a few straggling packs and aimless loners. Like most wizards, it never occurs to him that there may be other werewolves beyond the paltry numbers the Ministry is aware of – they ignore our muggle brothers and sisters and that is a major advantage for our tribes. Once we transform, there is no magic...we are all mostly equal when there is only teeth and claws and muscle and instinct to define us." He threw a feral smile at his companion.

"Remus..." Gregor growled quietly, eyes full of laughter. "You're stepping up onto that soap box again."

"Bear with me, Gregor. There is a point to my rambling. I promise." Straightening his robes, Remus shifted to throw one leg over the arm of his chair in a pose of decadent relaxation.

"Every new restrictive law is met with weak, limp-wristed attempts to improve our living conditions on the British Isles. I have not had the opportunity to review Albus' voting history, but I know in my gut that he is not using his prestige to gain votes in our favour. If that is true, then every piece of legislation is doomed to die on the Wizengamot floor before it even comes to a vote. If I am, indeed, correct about what is going on inside the Wizengamot chambers then Albus is playing us for fools." He snarled almost silently, his Wolf demanding justice for what it knew to be nothing more than lies and platitudes doled out by a condescending and manipulative old man. Despite his intense, deeply entrenched desire to believe otherwise, Remus found himself less and less inclined to trust Dumbledore's word.

"I should bite him some full moon...see how well he manages without Wolfsbane..."

Eyes wide, shoulders shaking with laughter, Gregor snorted his amusement before giving it full reign, his belly laughs drawing curious gazes from the other Council members and their attendant pack members.

“Such violence, brother-wolf. One could easily start to believe that your mild, bookish nature is naught but a façade if you keep making statements like that.”

“I’m not so sure that that would be a bad thing anymore...”

Head cocked to one side, curiosity evident in his wolfishly toothy grin, Gregor gestured for Remus to speak his mind. He was not to be disappointed, though the arrival of the rest of the Council did delay the gratification of his request.

“Are you encouraging him again, Gregor? I would have thought you’d give up trying to corrupt him from his oh so trusting ways by now.” A small, petite young woman with dark hair and pale skin wandered into the circle and took a seat near the two men.

“I surely never would have expected to hear the esteemed Remus Lupin speaking ill of the Great Lord of the Light. Threatening to bite someone with malicious intent, hmm? Why Remus, I’m delighted with your progress!” She laughed, her delight ringing through the clearing like crystal bell tones.

“Oh, come now, Sophie,” Gregor chastised playfully. “Be polite to your Brother. You two are the youngest on this Council, and youth makes for strong, often fickle opinions. You are a perfect example of just how fickle.”

Sniggering as the Celtic woman frowned petulantly, Remus settled even more deeply into his deceptively lazy, boneless sprawl.

“Indeed, Sister. Have you ever decisively made up your mind about anything other than what to wear or what to hunt?”

“Why you insolent cub! How dare you!” Sophie huffed, sapphire blue eyes darkening towards black as her irritation spiked towards anger. “You can be a real bastard sometimes, Remus.”

“Sophie...I apologize.” Remus gave the woman a sour look, the expression belying his laid back appearance. “I shouldn’t have taken my pique out on you. I’m just so...angry about the situation back in Britain...”

“I suppose I can’t blame you for that,” Sophie admitted grudgingly. “We have it so much better here in Ireland. Hell, even Germany is better to our People than Britain could ever dream of being.”

Several others took their seats, completing the Council of twelve elders and pack leaders. Gregor looked to each in turn before opening the floor for news and informative reporting.

“Does anyone have anything fresh or new to share?”

“The Shadow Spire Tribe of Romania was approached by emissaries of the Dark Lord not more than a moon ago,” a powerfully built, swarthy brunette muttered, his voice a deep, raspy growl that seemed to vibrate in the air. “They were also inquiring about any other packs or individuals that might consider joining their ranks. They wanted vampires, too, the crazy bastards. We ...respectfully declined the offer and sent the emissaries to visit with The Count.”

“The Count?” Remus inquired, one eyebrow arched.

“Yes. The mountain that rises from the lands of my Tribe is home to a very old vampire. He’s known as the Count, but we Shadow Spires, we know him as Vladislaus. He is more than happy to entertain nosy Death Eaters for a night or two.” The swarthy werewolf smiled wickedly and settled comfortably into his seat.

Filing that tidbit of information away for future reference, Remus nodded his appreciation for the explanation. If he had understood the implications properly, then this vampire did not care for having supporters of the Dark Lord in his territory.

“Voldemort must be desperate if he’s going as far as Romania...”

“I think we all can agree that the mad man is beyond desperate if he’s courting the vampire clans,” Gregor muttered. “Has anyone else been openly approached?” A few reported individual defections and emissaries, but few of the pack leaders were ready to make a decision and had just as bluntly told the wizards to come back with a better offer.

“Fine. Now, Remus. Back to our previous discussion. I wish to hear your thoughts on the Dark One and the situation in your home territory.”

Remus nodded, his posture shifting to reflect his disquiet and mounting aggression in regards to the subject matter.

“Dumbledore has failed us yet again, my brothers and sisters. The most recent legislation for safe houses and readily available Wolfsbane potion has been denied at the highest levels of the Wizengamot. The British Ministry is tightening its Registration Acts and all unregistered lycanthropes are being sent to Azkaban to await processing. Beyond the political arena, or perhaps in the heart of it, this is what it all boils down to.”

Remus looked around the circle of gathered Tribe Leaders and council Elders, his amber eyes flashing passionately.

“The Dark Lord offers us nothing. He will not suffer us to live once we have won his war with our blood. We are merely tools to be used and discarded. The Ministry and Dumbledore are each no better than the other. They see our usefulness in the battle itself, but not our humanity and our right to be a part of magical society. We need another option besides these hypocritical old men or vanishing into the forests and muggle cities.”

“What of your Cub, The Boy Who Lived?” Sophie met Remus’ gaze intently, dark blue eyes seeking answers. “What says he?”

“Yes, Remus. What is the Chosen Child’s stand on the war and more importantly so, the rights of the Tribes and our magical brethren?” Gregor studied his amber eyed companion expectantly.

“I am kept from his side more often than not, so I cannot say what his opinions are at this juncture.” Remus growled unhappily. “I will have to spend some time with him to acquaint myself with his current views. Once I find out exactly what those views are, I will return to speak my answer for the Council. Hopefully I will be able to do so by the next Moon. He will be sixteen then.”

“Celebrate your Cub’s Coming of Age, Remus. It only happens once per lifetime,” Gregor stated. “Come to us with word of the Chosen Child in two moons time. Now, it is time for the Gathering,” Gregor stated and stood. “We go to our Mother Moon’s calling; we dance to no tune but her own silver song.”

“It will be as you say, Gregor.” Remus turned his face up to the moon with a soft whine of longing, amber eyes flaring with an eerie light as the pregnant silvery-white sphere rose high enough to bathe them in its cool light.

“Now, brothers and sisters...let us shed these human forms and run to our Mother.” Shrugging out of his robes, he howled joyfully as the call of the moon coaxed the much larger Silver Wolf from the cage of his slender body.

July 3rd, St. Mungo’s, Office of Master Mind Healer Octavius Monroe

Fidgeting a bit, Ron cleared his throat and eyed Healer Monroe through his hair. He really didn’t feel like talking about his experience in the Department of Mysteries and the nearly prophetic timeline the brain creature had left in his head, so he figured he might as well do the Gryffindor thing and just jump in with both feet about what he really wanted to discuss today.

“Is it, uh, normal to have a room in your head that has a pool of light in the floor?” He restrained the urge to grin when the Healer’s head came up abruptly, eyes widening with surprise. Yes! He pumped a mental fist in the air. I got him with that one. About damn time I

managed to surprise him, instead of the other way around. "A room with doors and passages and stuff?"

"That is fairly normal, actually. Normal but rare enough since so few actually study the mind arts with enough discipline to master them and discover such a personal place of power within their own mind. It requires a great deal of meditative study for most people to encounter such an occurrence, but once someone manages to access their magical core on the conscious level, that is the way it is most commonly described. What is this metaphorical room like for you?"

"Uh, green, blue and silver walls...what does it mean if the pool is bricked up or something like that?" Ron shifted nervously as he tried to recall the details of what Harry had written. It wouldn't do to forget something important. Hermione would kill him.

"That could very likely represent a block placed on your magic," the Healer replied, sharp gaze taking in his patient's tell tale signs of nervousness. He kept his observations to himself for now, but wondered who Ron was asking these questions for, none the less. "How heavily blocked up is it?"

"Too small to climb in...maybe open enough to put a hand in or something," Ron replied off the top of his head. Harry's written tone had been so mournful on that point, so it must have been severely blocked.

"Sweet Merlin," Octavius muttered. The average wizard would scarcely be able to perform even the most basic of magical exercises if they were that heavily restricted. This did not bode well for whomever Ronald was talking about and he intended to get to the bottom of it. He could not tolerate the thought of a child being mistreated though deliberate mismanagement of magical blocks and other less savoury methods of keeping them malleable. "Is there anything else...wrong in the room?"

"Um, yeah. There are discoloured patches on the walls and covering the doors and windows and things like that. Some of the doors have chains holding them shut, too..."

“Windows and other basic openings tend to lead to memories and places where groups of memories are kept. Doors most often lead to magical gifts and talents and on fairly common occasions, memories that are being suppressed by the person them self. To have these openings blocked or secured in such a way makes me inclined to think of memory and heritage suppression charms.”

“Magical gifts?”

“Many magical families, especially the older ones have special things they are very good at, talents and abilities that are known to belong to that bloodline.”

“Oh, kind of like how my brother Bill can feel wards and curses really easily and Charlie has a way with dragons?” Ron grinned his delight over this discovery. “Maybe even my ability at chess?”

“You are particularly gifted at strategy, Mr. Weasley. It may very well be a Gift,” Octavius agreed. “The same applies to your brother’s very specialized abilities. Bill is a Curse breaker for Gringotts and Charlie is a Dragon Handler in Romania, correct?”

“Yeah, that would be them. They drive Mum crazy with all of the dangerous things they do. So, things like Parseltongue would be considered a magical gift, too, huh?” Ron’s eyes widened when Healer Monroe grinned at him and sat forward with an intently focused expression that said he had narrowed down a search to a very specific conclusion. “Damn my mouth...” He grumbled quietly.

“Yes, Parseltongue is a very rare and selective Magical Gift and only one bloodline is known to manifest it at all,” Octavius murmured. “Since there are only two currently known Parseltongues, and I sincerely doubt you are friends with You Know Who, I feel it safe to guess that you must be poking around for Mr. Potter. I understand if you feel that you cannot tell me what led you to this series of disturbing discoveries, but please attempt to get your friend some assistance in dealing with this problem. If it is indeed Mr. Potter that has been wronged in this way, then I will leave it to you to let him know that I would be more than willing to help him to the best of my ability.”

Ron sighed and searched the man's gaze intently, something inside telling him the best move would be to trust him.

"I can't go into details without getting his permission, Healer Monroe. I just can't do that to him, but I'll tell you what I can. Harry's bloody amazing at getting out of scrapes no one else would stand a chance of surviving, so don't worry so much." Ron shrugged, ears turning pink at the knowing look on the healer's face.

"Someone told him....he was told the patches and chains were to hide memories, bind his magic and other things like that."

Octavius nodded solemnly.

"Your friend is an amazing wizard if half of what the Prophet and Quibbler have to say is even remotely based on fact, and I am not referring to the articles that question his sanity. Now, that list of restrictions sounds consistent with what I know of this kind of magical residue and the way you have described everything. Some of what you described is even more questionable and I can't figure why someone would want to obliviate him or restrict his access to his memories and magical ability. It can be quite damaging to young minds, especially."

"Another friend, someone I've known a long time, was Obliviated when he was really young. Do you think there's anything you can do to help him?"

"How young was this friend of yours?"

"Not very old...less than a year and a half, I think," Ron muttered, just the mention of Neville's problems enough to make him angry all over again.

Aware of only one child the boy could be speaking of, the Healer made a decision and decided to act on it. If he couldn't help the Potter boy, he would help the Longbottom's son. "Please feel free to bring your friend with you to one of your sessions. I can't promise I

will be able to fix whatever damage he may have suffered, but I will do everything I can to help him.” He let out a slow, deep breath.

“Now, if you wish to locate your magical core and begin developing your own inner control, then I suggest that you start by trying to learn meditation and, once you have mastered that to a satisfactory degree, Occlumency would be the next step. I am not implying that either of these skills is easy to master, but to do so would help you immeasurably with your current ordeal and access to your core would greatly improve your magical ability.” A solid grasp of Occlumency would keep the slimy bastard who did those things to Mr. Potter’s mind from having such an easy time doing so to this youngster as well, Octavius grumbled to himself. “If you find yourself in need of a book on either subject, simply let me know and I will make one available for your use.”

“Thank you, Healer Monroe. I guess I’ll see you Monday, then.” Ron rose to leave.

“You are quite welcome, Mr. Weasley. Now, you are healing, but I’d like to continue trying to pin down the exact nature of what the creature has done to your thought processes. Are you amenable to this?”

“Yes, sir. It would help to understand more of what’s going on in there.”

“Then I will see you next week. Good day, Mr. Weasley.” Octavius smiled a little as the red head left his office. He might not personally be up to fighting on the front lines, but he would make the most of this opportunity to aid the ones who clearly would be in the thick of things.

July 3rd, The Burrow

“Memory charms? More than one?!” Hermione sounded as appalled as the rest of the ‘Ministry Crew’ appeared and looked like she might want to be ill. “Magical suppression? That’s just...that’s...evil! Why would someone do that to Harry? He hasn’t done anything to deserve something like that!”

“More, well, at least equally important, is who did this to Harry.” Neville looked around at his friends. “Who is trying to control Harry and why are they doing it?”

“What if Harry isn’t the only one?” Ginny voiced the question that had been eating at her since she first saw a copy of Harry’s letter. She studied her friends and sibling intently, brown eyes flashing with anger at the thought of someone invading their minds and lives in such a way. “Would we even know if we had been Obliviated? Is there a way for us to know if something has been done to us?”

“Well, Healer Monroe said it was okay to bring ‘my friend’ to my next appointment,” stated Ron as he reached out to lightly thump Neville on the back of the head. “Seriously Nev, I didn’t tell him who I was talking about and he was still mad as hell that someone would do that to a child. He wants to help and if he can fix even part of what that spell did, I would be so happy for you.”

Blushing lightly under the attention that Ron’s statement had focused on him, Neville sighed.

“I do need to try, I guess. We all need to know if our memories have been altered in case there’s something important in there.”

“Have you written to Harry about all of this yet?” asked Luna, her eyes coming into sharp focus for a moment before softening into their usual dreamy appearance. “He’s going to blow up spectacularly. I really wish I could be there to see it...”

“Oh yeah, I really wish I could see him blow his top over this one. It would have to be brilliant!” Ginny giggled wickedly.

“He’ll be sixteen soon,” mused Luna, her comment seeming to come out of the blue. “Young Harry is going to Awaken.”

“Awaken?” Hermione frowned; that wasn’t a term she had encountered in all of her reading and she wasn’t certain she understood what Luna meant.

“Uh, it’s just another word purebloods used to use to describe a high power magical maturity,” Ron explained. “It’s not something that happens very often at all, really.”

“Mr. Harry ‘I Just Want To Be Normal’ Potter is going to love that,” Neville drawled in a remarkably good imitation of Draco Malfoy, causing the others to laugh uproariously. “Gran told me Professor Dumbledore went through a pretty massive maturity, an Awakening if you want to call it that, and I think it’s safe to guess that You Know Who did as well.”

“I guess that’s another thing I’ll have to look into once I can get someone to take me to Diagon Alley. I really need to do some research and magic keeps changing the rules...” Hermione sighed and made a note of the previously mentioned subject. “You really think Harry is as powerful as someone like Professor Dumbledore?”

“Hmm, let me think,” Neville mused quietly. “He cast a fully corporeal Patronus at the age of thirteen with what we now know was a restricted magical core. He’s faced and defeated You Know Who, or at least survived the encounter with minimal injury, four or five times now. Yeah, I think he’s got the potential to blow every body’s socks off.”

July 3rd, #4 Privet Drive

“Who’s on duty today, Dobby?” Harry was currently looking out his window and no one was in sight so he figured they had to be wearing an invisibility cloak or using a disillusionment charm. “Being here is driving me crazy. I need to get out and stretch my legs.”

“It’s ‘Dungus Dirty Man, Master Harry.’” Dobby muttered to himself, nose wrinkled at the thought of having the drunken thief any where near his master. “Hims wouldn’t know if yous was dancing on hims head.”

Coughing and laughing at the image his little friend’s words generated before his mind’s eye, the green eyed wizard groaned.

“You are too right, Dobby. I’m going to see if anyone is even paying attention these days and test how far I can get before an Order member tries to bring me back ‘because it isn’t safe’.”

“Dobby can takes you where you wants to go, Master Harry.”

“Not this time. I need to know if I can just up and walk out. I’ll be taking the Knight Bus, so I won’t be completely exposed to attack and Diagon Alley should be fairly safe as long as I’m careful.”

“Yous just be careful and calls for Dobby if yous needs him.”

“I will. I promise.” Patting his pocket to assure himself that his wand was safely in place, Harry retrieved his invisibility cloak and wrapped himself in its silky folds.

“Merlin, I love having this cloak.”

Pulling his wand from his pocket, Harry carefully slipped out of the house and headed for the park. He was torn between being angry over Albus’ choice of guards and elated that having Mundungus around made this jaunt so much easier to accomplish. Surely, if he was so bloody important, he would warrant a guard of at least Auror quality.

He made it a block from the house before the hair on the back of his neck stood up, prompting him to stick his wand out to summon the Knight Bus far sooner than he’d planned. The lurid purple bus appeared with a BANG and he leapt aboard as soon as the doors sprung open.

“Leaky Cauldron. QUICK!” Harry hissed out his request, eyes widening as he saw the reflected red light of a stunner coming at him in the glass beside the driver. Ducking down, he felt the crackle of magic as it passed harmlessly over his head. “Keep the change.” Thrusting two galleons into Stan’s hand, he stayed low and got to a bed as the bus lurched away.

Surprised to see Harry walking under his invisibility cloak even though Albus had assured him the distraught boy was likely to leave

his house in a grieving fit of rebellion, Kingsley Shacklebolt was a little slow to react. Seeing the boy getting onto the Knight Bus, he shot off a stunner and cursed at the teens reflexes. He trusted Albus to know how to handle The-Boy-Who-Lived and apparated to Hogwarts to find out where the uncooperative child might have gone.

Noting the presence of an Order member at the gates, Albus made his way down to the entry hall to meet the tall black Auror.

“What has occurred, Kingsley? Why have you left your post?”

“He did just what you said he would, Albus. He snuck out using that blasted cloak and took the Knight Bus. I tried to stun him, but he’s quick as a snake when it comes to dodging spells. I don’t know his habits well enough to look for him. Where would he have gone?”

“He has most likely gone to The Burrow or to Diagon Alley, my boy. Go check the Burrow’s wards. They are set to record the magical signature of everyone who passes through them, so you won’t have to upset Molly with the news that Harry is out wandering on his own. If he has not gone there, then he will be at the alley. It is not safe for him to be out in public, Kingsley. Use whatever means necessary to get him home and make sure he stays there. Voldemort will stop at nothing to capture or kill him.” Albus patted the Auror on the shoulder and twinkled at him in a grandfatherly way.

“He will thank you for your diligence and devotion to his safety once he has recovered his senses and taken the time to completely grieve for his Godfather. Now, go get him, Kingsley. There is no time to waste.”

Visibly relieved, Kingsley nodded and headed back to the apparition point just outside the gates of Hogwarts. He hadn’t wanted to be the one to admit to Molly that they had ‘lost’ Harry Potter.

Fuming at the gall of the boy, Albus stalked back into the castle, blue eyes icy as he fought to control his temper.

“How dare he disobey me! He knows it’s simply not safe for him to be out on his own.” Planning a bit of behavioural readjustment for when

he brought the boy to Grimmauld Place in early August soothed his ire quite nicely. "He really is overdue an attitude adjustment anyway. He's not playing his part."

July 3rd, Back at #4 Privet Drive

Harry woke up on his lumpy excuse for a bed and frowned. When had he gone to bed? The last he recalled was reading through some of his old textbooks right after he had arrived, and it was far too early to be the same day, if he was judging the sun correctly. A light touch on his arm made him leap away with a sharply startled 'Eeep!', the sound escaping before he could contain it. Panting, he looked down at Dobby and frowned.

"Dobby? Why are you here?"

"Oh, Master Harry Potter, sir! Dobby was knowing something was wrong but hims couldn't get to yous. Then yous walked back in the front door without yous cloak on. Have you lost yous invisibility cloak, Master Harry?"

"Master?" A deeply comforting bond warmed him when he thought this, and he knew something was wrong with him. Frowning hard, eyes flaring with an eerie green light, Harry struggled to remember exactly why it felt right for Dobby to call him 'master'. "You're my elf? You didn't want to be free any more?"

"Yes Master Harry. Yous bonded with Dobby yesterday. You is making Dobby the happiest house elf. Is you not remembering more than yous was not remembering before?"

"More?" The concept of not remembering things sent a fearful twinge through him and he broke out in a sweat. "You said I left with my cloak, but I didn't have it when I came back?"

Dobby nodded and he dropped down to check under the loose floor board. His hands found only his photo album and the marauder's map. Shifting over to his trunk, he rooted through it with almost frantic energy until he had to accept the conclusion that his cloak wasn't all that was missing. He patted his pockets to check for his wand and,

when he didn't feel its reassuring warmth, a burst of rage burned through him with frightening intensity. His head cleared abruptly.

"Where is my wand? It was in my pocket the last I remember..."

"You was taking it with yous, Master Harry." Dobby moaned and started to wring his ears as his distress became more than he could tolerate without action of some kind. "Bad wizards is making Master Harry forget again..."

Letting out a howl of unfettered rage, the young wizard felt something new and fragile shatter inside his mind. Face wet with tears, features twisted into a vicious snarl, he remembered the attack as he boarded the Knight Bus, remembered arriving at the Leaky cauldron and waving at Tom as he made his way towards the Alley.

"I walked up to tap the bricks and that's it. Who ever tried to stun me earlier must have gotten me then. They took my cloak and my wand...I didn't have them when I walked in the house...Who was near the property when I walked back in?"

"No wizards I could sense, Master Harry." Dobby's ears drooped sadly even as anger filled his own large eyes. "Dungus Dirty Man was still sleeping in yard."

"I will find out who did this and I will get even," Harry growled. "This is going to stop." He focused on Dobby once more. "Have you had a chance to go to Gringotts or book shopping yet?"

"Yous needed me, so Dobby came home before hims could get started. Dobby can be going for you now if yous wants."

"It can wait until tomorrow, Dobby. I need to figure out exactly what I'm going to do and how I'm going to manage it without a wand. Dammit, I need a wand and I can't get one...Dammit, Dumbledore! I hate you!" Harry growled and then sat back abruptly, his green focused on his house elf with unwavering intensity. If what he was thinking was true, then it was definitely a sobering thought.

“Would I have even known I had been Obliviated again if I hadn’t bonded with you recently?”

“Dobby is not knowing for certain, Master Harry, but elves know when things happen to their master’s magic...”

“Thank you, Dobby...I think I’m going to take a nap now...” Lying back with a contemplative expression on his face, Harry drifted off into a light doze while thinking of other ways a house elf benefited a wizard they chose to help.

July 4th, The Burrow

“Okay, guys, Bill was nice enough to take me to Flourish & Botts and I have a list of spells that affect or alter memory, behaviour or inherited magical gifts.” Unhappiness shone out starkly from the bushy haired witch’s eyes. “I know I couldn’t have found everything, even with Bill finding books for me. I still can’t believe it’s this long of a list...”

“You let Bill help you?” squawked Ron, eyes widening at the idea that his brother might report them to Dumbledore. “Hermione! He’s an Order member! He might tell someone...”

“I told him I was doing an extra credit report for Advanced Charms and that I had gotten the idea from Professor Moody’s demonstrations last year in Defence Class. He seemed to think it was a good subject since the Ministry needs talented Obliviators.” She shook her head miserably. “It’s just horrible to do something like that to someone who hasn’t done anything wrong...”

“It is the nature of humans to control the world around them, including their fellow man. Why does this surprise you?” Luna asked, eyes clear and curious.

“It surprises her because Hermione still believes that people are better than that.” Ginny sat down beside the saddened witch and hugged her affectionately. “It’s okay, ‘Mione. Keep thinking that way as long as it doesn’t blind you to the facts. Someone has to be the idealist in our crazy bunch and it might as well be you.”

Sniffing a little, Hermione nodded and hugged the younger girl back with a grateful smile.

"Thanks, Ginny. I really needed a hug after looking through all of those books." She focused on Luna and grinned a little. "I know it shouldn't surprise me, Luna...it just...it's the fact that so many of these spells are dark or verging very close on it and someone has been using them on someone I care about."

"I'm not sure they're working so hot anymore," Neville mused thoughtfully. "Remember how angry Harry was last year? How oddly he was acting? C'mon, he fought off the Imperious cast by an Inner Circle Death Eater. I was impressed when I thought it was just cast by an Auror, but that made it even more impressive."

"So you think he's fighting the spells, right?" Ron considered that point and then nodded his agreement. "If you're right about the spells not working as well, it could mean that whoever cast them might have assumed they would hold indefinitely. They may not have done anything to reinforce them. I mean, spells like this would only last so long before they will eventually need to be...recharged or something, right?"

Eyeing Ron like he was an amazing new species, Luna hummed her approval.

"It's possible, Ronald. Unfortunately, I don't think an Obliviate wears off, but that's a great thought on the rest."

"Then we all need to go see Healer Monroe, no doubt about it. I'm just worried that some of these spells may have been used on us, too," Ron stated.

"As much trouble as we all get into with Harry, I'd be shocked if we hadn't all been Obliviated at least once," Ginny grumbled under her breath.

“Truly great madness cannot be achieved without significant intelligence.” - Henrik Tikkanen

July 4th, # 4 Privet Drive

“Does Master have any other letters for Dobby?”

“No, I think that’s everything for now. You have the book list, right?”

“Dobby is having it, Master Harry.”

“Okay. Just get those letters out and get to Gringotts. I’d really like to know what sort of assets I have to work with in case I need to drop out of sight.” Sighing expressively, the young wizard shook his head as if to clear it. “And I would really appreciate you getting those books for me.”

“Dobby is getting what you require!” Vanishing with a soft ‘pop’, the little elf left his master alone to his thoughts.

Chuckling mirthlessly once Dobby was gone, Harry shook his head again and looked around the small room he was coming to recognize as being little better than a prison cell in Azkaban.

“Who doesn’t trust whom, eh? Who did you talk into doing your dirty work for you this time?”

Contemplating Dumbledore’s latest offence against him with a growing sense of disgust, Harry let out a shuddery breath, thoughts hazing slightly as grief rushed up through the cracks in ever more degraded memory charms and old spell work.

“Why’d you have to die, Sirius? I need your help...and because of me, you’re gone...”

Silent tears made glistening tracks over his cheeks and wracking sobs shook his slender frame.

July 4th, A remote area in Ireland

"I have several stops to make before I return to London for my Cub's birthday, so I will take my leave, Gregor. Is there anything in particular the Council wishes me to seek out?"

"Pursue your curiosity regarding Dumbledore's voting history," the elder lycanthrope suggested. "And cautiously begin feeling out any other groups who may support our cause, most especially so if the Chosen Child offers us a fourth side, an alternative to what we have already been...offered."

Nodding his understanding, Remus sighed and looked up into the rapidly darkening storm clouds that were gathering above them.

"They are like this war," he mused unhappily. "Those storm clouds came as if without warning, yet I know they have been brewing somewhere for quite some time. The conditions had to be just right for them to develop this way out of a perfectly peaceful sky. Fifteen years ago, we all believed our peace was assured, that it would last forever. Hell, even a scarce few months ago we still lived under that blissful illusion, but here we are, preparing to weather another war, this one potentially worse than the last..."

"Nature, the universe itself, abhors a vacuum, Remus. The Dark One's fall left a void, a surplus of light and not near enough Darkness to fill it. So now, Nature is working to restore the balance."

"Somehow that worries me more than the Dark One. Nature's ways are rarely kind."

"She is a harsh Mother," Gregor agreed, thoughts focused on the coming storm.

July 4th, Hogwart's School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Raising his gaze from the most current edition of his favourite potions journal, Severus Snape picked up a snifter of brandy and gazed into the amber liquid, a slight smile curving his lips. Inhaling the warmth of the alcohol's scent, he took a drink and savoured it's rich, smooth flavour before swallowing it and enjoying the warming burn it left in it's wake. Sighing contentedly, he relaxed further into his seat.

The past week had been as close to idyllic as he dared to hope for himself. Those dunderheads that people insisted on calling children were gone and would not be returning until the beginning of September and Albus was away from the castle for Wizengamot meetings and other Ministry duties. He had the place mostly to himself and he liked it that way. Life was good.

"Hell, even the Dark Lord has left me in peace lately," he mused aloud and took another drink of his brandy. At that moment, Murphy decided it was time to enact his Law, and a sharp burning pain startled the Death Eater turned spy. Dropping the glass when the muscles of his hand and arm convulsed briefly, Severus clutched at the most intense spot of pain on his left forearm and cursed viciously.

Stalking to the cloak closet once the immediate nature of the pain had eased, he snatched out a rather distinctive set of robes and checked the inner pocket to make sure his mask was in its place. Assured of its presence, he made haste for the Apparition point just outside Hogwart's gates.

July 4th, Courtroom # 1, Ministry of Magic

Watching over the Wizengamot Chamber from his place on high, the Chief Warlock and Supreme Mugwump made careful note of forming alliances and burgeoning conflicts, twinkling blue eyes missing nothing he considered important. Nodding and twinkling at the titled gentry around him, lulling them all with his grandfatherly appearance, he played the political game like the gifted chess master that he was.

New pieces of legislation were introduced for preliminary review, but he paid the speakers little mind. He would receive a copy of the transcript once the session was over and would review it at his leisure once he returned to Hogwarts that evening. He perked up when the Potter proxy came forward to propose a bit of legislation he had suggested and nurtured through every stage of its development.

"Greetings, M'lords," a soft spoken and unremarkably average looking wizard began, his gaze flicking briefly to Dumbledore before he resumed his introduction. "I have new legislation to introduce for

your consideration. Law 2460, articles one through six, sections all, relates to the early emancipation of minor wizards under the ancient laws, or more specifically it moves to prevent such actions. The intention behind this law is to protect our children and our future from the rash actions of irresponsible youth. We were all young once, M'lords, and we knew everything at the time. Now that we are all more seasoned, we know that we knew nothing of what we needed to properly make our way in the world before we were of age."

"What are the age restrictions?" One Lord questioned.

"Seventeen will still be acknowledged as the proper coming of age in our world, M'lord, but the clauses that allowed for the earlier emancipation of youths as young as fourteen are being circumvented, allowing for proper maturity before a young Lord or Lady takes on the reins of familial duty."

"Are there to be no exceptions to this ruling? Surely there are going to be cases where a family must have guidance prior to their Lord or Lady turning seventeen, especially so if there is no able guardian available to act as Regent," Baron Nott interjected.

"In the very rare instance that an heir of a terminating line of inheritance has capably managed to complete their O.W.L. and N.E.W.T. testing prior to the usually prescribed timeframes with no less than an Acceptable on all attempted tests is the primary exception the Ministry would be willing to acknowledge, Baron Nott."

"Only an Acceptable? Shouldn't we at least expect an Exceeds Expectations from the best and brightest of our upcoming young Lords and Ladies?" Albus' tone was full of gentle reproach and it had the desired effect. Though several members of the Wizengamot squirmed uncomfortably, the motion was seconded and the law was set for consideration and would be voted upon during the August session.

A proper education is important, after all, Albus noted to himself in a smug tone. And this covers several bases in regards to a certain half-blood wizard I know.

July 4th, Unplottable Location

Voldemort contemplated his reflection in the mirror and shook his head with a sound of disgust. He wasn't certain why he was suddenly so keenly aware of his appearance, but part of his mind told him it had been a far cry from his youthful attractiveness for more decades than he cared to acknowledge.

"This state I have reduced myself to is completely unacceptable."

He looked down at Nagini when she rubbed her coils against his calf with the sinuous grace only a snake could manage without undue effort; her presence made him smile almost invisibly before that too faded back into a frown.

//Hello, Nagini, my darling. Have you anything to report?//

//Your servants are restless. They are uncertain of your recent moods; a great deal more so than usual.// the large cobra hissed in reply. //I am pleased by the return of your mind, nestling. You have been strange these last months but recently...//

//It's been far too long since my thoughts were this clear,// the Dark Lord admitted to the only confidante he allowed him self. //I lost myself at some point and I still don't know why my focus took so long to come back.//

//The other Speaker hurt you,// Nagini hissed angrily. //Let me hurt him back for you, nestling.//

//No, not yet, my darling,// Voldemort mused. //We are tightly bound, he and I. As he is, his strength is no match for mine, but as he grows stronger, I grow stronger. Let my little Serpent enjoy his time of calm before the storm.//

//If you wish it,// the snake agreed grudgingly and glided over to the hearth. //But I do not like this bond you have with the other Speaker. He is not your nest mate or hatchling...he is an egg-breaker...//

Straightening his dressing robe and belting it more securely, Voldemort walked over and sat down in his favourite chair by the fire, hands stroking the warmed scales of his familiar once she had slithered up to coil on his lap.

//I will kill my little Serpent when the time is right, my darling. Do not worry yourself about him. He does not have the strength or the power it would require to break up my nest.//

The part of Voldemort that was still very much Tom Riddle, the part that was drawing him ever closer to sanity, was uneasy with that statement and remembered the pain of being ripped from his body when his Avada Kedavra rebounded off of an insignificant toddler and more recently recalled the terror of seeing the soul bond that was twined so thickly and brightly between himself and 'his little Serpent'.

What if your nest is already broken? The Dark Lord mused to himself. What if you simply can't or won't see it yet? The young Serpent is freeing himself from the Old Man's bondage...when he does, can you truly predict which way he will choose to strike? The Dark Lord shook off the unwanted train of thought and returned to stroking Nagini in an attempt to calm himself.

//I have not spent as much time with you as I should.//

//You are forgiven for being busy, nestling.// Nagini relaxed into the warmth of the fire and the pleasure of her Master's touch for several minutes before speaking again. //What has you so out of sorts today? It is something else besides the other Speaker.//

//It is this thing I have turned myself into. I can barely stand to look at myself. Admittedly, I have little trouble cowing even the bravest of my Death Eaters with this face, but I would have my true appearance restored.//

//So command the one who dwells in the cave of bubbling pots. Can he not make you whole?//

Chuckling a bit over Nagini's fairly accurate description of the potions lab, Voldemort contemplated the suggestion, and then smirked.

//It is a possibility and if anyone can brew the potions I require, it would be Severus Snape.// Lifting his still coiled familiar, he stood and placed her on the hearth rug with gentle care. //Enjoy the heat, my darling. I have things to attend to.//

//Of course, nestling.//

Stalking out, the Dark Lord bellowed for his most faithful follower.

“Wormtail!”

July 4th, Gringotts

Dobby ‘popped’ to the steps outside of Gringotts and made his way inside to find the goblin his Master had requested. Gaining the attention of an unoccupied teller after a short wait in line, the elf declared him self.

“I is needing to speak to Griphook. My Master is telling me to ask for him.”

The teller shrugged indifferently, scribbled a note on a scrap of parchment and dropped it in his out box, where it promptly vanished. The elf wore no family crest, so it couldn’t be that pressing, he mused.

“Griphook will be up shortly. Please move to the side until he calls for you.”

“Dobby is thanking you.” Bouncing off to the side as instructed, the elf settled in to wait.

Griphook made his way up to the lobby in answer to a curt and curiosity inspiring summons. Entering the lobby, he spotted the lone house elf his clansman had referred to.

“You requested Griphook?”

“Oh yes, Mister Griphook! My master sent me to ask for you. Hims says you was kind to him and hims never forgot.” Dobby held out the letter he’d been clutching. “My Master needs your help...”

“Follow me. I believe my office would be a more appropriate place for a discussion such as this.” Leading the way through several twisting corridors, the goblin finally entered a small office and gestured for the elf to sit while he sat down behind his desk. Opening the letter, his eyes widened more and more the further on he read.

Griphook,

I doubt you remember me, but you made a definite impression on an eleven year old novice to the wizarding world. Now, five years later, I fear I am barely more prepared than that novice and I hope you can help me again.

I need my house elf to be able to handle my business errands for me, as I am forbidden to leave my relative’s home. I do not have possession of my vault key and do not know who does have it in hand, as it was taken from me several years ago on Headmaster Dumbledore’s order.

Besides acquiring access to my funds, I am also in need of an account statement, something I have never received. If there is any correspondence from Gringotts that I should be aware of, please send it back with my elf so that I may be brought up to date on what is expected of me in my interactions with your people and the bank.

Any assistance that you or your fellow goblins can provide is greatly appreciated.

In your debt,

Harry James Potter

Shocked that a wizard remembered him after one meeting, Griphook’s face took on a grim expression, his gaze focused on the name of the wizard in question.

“Please wait here. I must speak to my manager about specific options that may be available to your Master. There is also paperwork I need to retrieve. It will allow us to confirm his identity without requiring his presence at this time...”

Nodding his understanding, Dobby wrung his hands nervously none the less. The look on the goblin’s face was not a happy look.

“Dobby is thanking you, Mister Griphook.”

July 4th, Unplottable Location

Prostrating himself before the Dark Lord, Severus kissed the hem of his Master’s robe and held himself still while taking that last quiet moment to clear his mind of any extraneous thoughts and putting as much focus as he dared into strengthening his Occlumency shields. He hated being alone with Voldemort. It gave the gifted Legilimens far too much time to focus entirely on the thoughts and behaviour of his wayward spy in the camp of the Light.

“How may I serve you, my Lord?”

“Ah, eager as always, I see. That is good, Ssseverusss. Very good.” Voldemort studied the back of the potion master’s head for a long moment before cutting to the chase. “What potions do you know of that would restore my appearance?”

“Cosmetically or actual full restoration, my Lord?” Thinking quickly, Severus compiled a list of potions that would meet both requirements. The list was woefully short and he felt certain that his master was already aware of them.

“Ever the wily Slytherin, my servant. Full restoration, of course. If I wanted a cosmetic fix, I would simply use Glamourie charms and be done with it.”

“Of course, my Lord. I know of only a few potions, most notably the Recreo Primaevus Draught, the Expurgo Corporeus Draught and the De-Aging Potion. I have most of the components, but I would need to acquire the rarer ones to ensure freshness and quality.”

Pleased by his potion master's ready response and the unexpected addition of the de-aging potion, Voldemort nodded his acceptance

"Beyond the obvious purpose, why suggest the de-aging potion?"

"Reversing the effects of age in wizards often entails a simple renewal and revitalization of the flesh, which is in part my Lord's request. It may not give you a significantly younger appearance, but I believe it will assist the other potions in doing their work. Overall, I believe you would be pleased with the results."

"Go then, and do not fail me in this task, Severus."

"It will be as you say, my Lord," Severus murmured and Disapparated away.

July 4th, Gringotts

"Chieftain Ragnok? Oc Dager Griphook claims urgent news," Shethrock stated. "Should I send him away?"

"Send him in. I will deal with him if his news is without consequence," Ragnok stated and sat back to wait for the younger goblin's arrival.

Bowing deeply to his chieftain, Griphook held himself still until the elder goblin deigned to acknowledge his presence. A quiet grunt signalled his reprieve and he straightened.

"The Chosen Child's house elf is in my office, Sheklac. He brought a most disturbing letter..."

Taking the parchment from Griphook, Ragnok bent his head to read the young wizard's plea for help. That the wizard was appealing to the goblins and not his own kind was a point the elder goblin could not ignore, especially given the boy's position in their future. Goblin Seer's rarely foresaw events relating to other species, but when they did, all goblins took them seriously.

“Put together a full statement of the Potter Heir’s account and gather together the books written by our last Goblin Friend while the elf gets his master’s signature authenticated. Also, dictate a letter requesting young Mr. Potter’s presence for a private reading of the Black will. At least he is cunning enough to find ways around the controls Dumbledore has placed on him.”

Ragnok sighed heavily. “Once the elf returns, give him the statements, books and letter for Mr. Potter and assign a mail pouch to the young Heir so he can receive his official Gringotts mail without further hassle.”

“What method of money handling would you prefer I offer, Sheklac?”

“A money pouch keyed to the elf and one keyed to Mr. Potter through his signature authentication parchment.”

“I will complete everything to your specifications, Sheklac. Thank you for this audience.” Griphook bowed deeply to the elder war leader.

“You showed good sense, Oc Dager Griphook. Since you have the young Heir’s trust, I am appointing you as his account manager. Do not prove me wrong.”

“Thank you, Sheklac! I will not fail you!”

Dobby looked up when Griphook returned with a sealed roll of parchment, his large eyes full of curiosity as he accepted it from him.

“I am needing to take this to my master?”

“Have your master read through the parchment and sign it in the indicated box at the bottom. Next to the signature box is an authentication square. He will need to place three drops of blood within the square. Return here once he has done so and I will handle the rest of Mr. Potter’s requests.”

“Thank you, Mister Griphook! Dobby will be coming back shortly.”

July 4th, Hogwart’s School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Apparating back to the location he had left such a short time ago, Severus shed the Death Eater robes and mask, sighed his relief and began the walk back up to Hogwarts. If he was in luck, Albus would still be gone and he'd have time for at least one stiff shot of brandy before he had to give his report to the old man.

Luck was with him this time and he was able to properly savour two full snifters of his favourite alcoholic beverage while contemplating the fact that he had escaped this most recent meeting without punishment of any kind, something he rarely recalled happening even with visits as short as this one had been. The detector he had set to let him know when Albus returned to the castle chimed then settled into a pale glow and he reluctantly rose to go speak to the Head Master.

Settling into his poufy chair, Albus ordered tea from the house elf who appeared at his call, then stretched with a low groan. Smiling a little as his back relaxed, he contemplated the irony of having the Potter proxy offer up the legislation that would put a stop to the move that he was certain Sirius Black had planned in his will – the emancipation of one Harry James Potter.

"Not on my watch," he murmured and poured a cup of tea once it appeared. A glance at his desk showed Severus to be on his way out of the dungeons, causing the Head Master to arch an eyebrow inquisitively.

"Now that's curious. I wonder why the dear boy is willing to come crawling out of his hole during the first week of the summer."

"He was summoned by You-Know-Who a short while ago," stated Head Master Dippet from his portrait. "The young man wasn't gone very long for once. Might have been a false alarm."

"Tom doesn't do false alarms," Albus mused quietly. "I am most curious what the boy has to report this time."

Arriving before the stone gargoyle that guarded the entrance to the Head Master's office, Severus sneered at the great beast.

“Snickers’ bars,” he growled and rode the revolving stairs up and walked in before Albus could even finish calling to him. “Albus,” he muttered curtly and nodded a greeting while taking his usual seat.

“My word, Severus! What has you in such a foul temper? Would you care for tea? Lemon drop?”

“Tea would be most welcome. Thank you,” Severus murmured and accepted the proffered cup with full knowledge that it was probably laced with a calming draught. Right now, he felt like he needed it, so he ignored it.

“The Dark Lord summoned me alone less than an hour ago and requested the potions necessary to restore his body to its proper state.”

“Do you have any idea what prompted this sudden desire to correct the damage he’s done to himself?”

“He has been strangely quiet since the events last year, when he regained his body at Little Hangleton,” Severus mused. “Merlin, but it’s been harder than ever to understand what he wants and expects from us! At one meeting he would sound completely clear headed and rational, then at the next he’d be back to using the Cruciatus for the slightest hint of perceived wrong doing.”

The dark wizard sighed expressively. “But you know all of this already. Today was the first summons I have received since the events at the Ministry, so I can only guess that he was gravely injured by his encounter with you. He was quite lucid today, quite rational and let me go with nothing more than a verbal threat to not fail him.”

Nodding to acknowledge that he had heard what the younger man had to say, Albus tapped his steepled fingers against his chin and contemplated this latest tidbit of news.

“What potions does he require from you?”

“The Recreo Primaevus Draught, Expurgo Corporeus Draught and the De-Aging Potion.”

“Merlin’s Beard,” Albus breathed. “Those are old and powerful restoratives. Will you even be able to complete them? Tom is not quite as gifted as your self when it comes to potions, but I am certain he would know if they were improperly prepared.”

“He would know if I made them improperly and will likely make them himself as well, just in case I do make an error,” Severus grudgingly admitted. “Other than vanity, I can see no purpose to his request.”

“Ah, but vanity is a powerful motivator, Severus. Perhaps there is someone he wishes to openly pursue? If that were the case, he would want to look his best. Of course, it is more likely that he has some other motivation in mind.”

Unable to picture the Dark Lord pursuing the favour of some pure blooded witch or wizard, Severus opted to believe in an ulterior motive that neither of them had considered as of yet.

“I will see what I can find out regarding his possible motives. As it stands, I have some travelling to do to obtain all of the necessary ingredients for the three potions. I must at least give the impression that I am carrying through with his wishes.”

“Do your very best to obtain the ingredients you require. It may be in our best interests for you to brew those potions to the best of your ability, my boy. The Expurgo Corporeus Draught is very powerful and may well undo some of the darker modifications he has made to himself and he may also have a noticeable period of recovery from the whole restoration process. This could very well be the opening we have been looking for.”

Twinkle at full blast, Albus smiled at the surly potion master. “Now, why don’t you go back to enjoying your solitude and your brandy for a day or so before you head out to go ingredient hunting?”

“I had every intention of doing exactly that, Albus.” Severus finished his tea and exited the office as the calming potion did its job and

relaxed some of the tension from his frame. Now that he had the benefit of temporarily enforced calm, he planned to make the most of it and organize his thoughts and itinerary before returning to his journals and the comfort that lay in his bottle of brandy.

July 4th, # 4 Privet Drive

Dobby popped into his master's bedroom after a quick stop at Hogwarts to prepare a large lunch for the overly thin teenager. He took one look at the young wizard and sighed softly. He had clearly cried himself to sleep over something and the little elf felt helpless to protect his beloved master from these pains of the heart.

"Master Harry, please be waking up. Dobby has lunch for yous and papers for yous to sign from Gringotts."

Stirring, Harry wiped at his face reflexively and sat up with a groan. Putting his glasses back on, he breathed in deeply and sighed.

"That smells great, Dobby. Thanks. I'll eat once I look over the papers. How did it go?"

"Mister Griphook was very helpful, Master Harry. Hims was giving Dobby a letter so all of yous business will be going to hims and hims sent these papers so the goblins can gets yous key back and let Dobby do yous shopping for yous." Handing the roll of parchment over, the elf waited patiently for Harry to read through it.

Reading the document through carefully, Harry was grateful for and surprised by how straightforward and simple the overall text was. He had honestly expected something only a lawyer could understand. Taking it over to his desk, he signed the document and then looked around with a frown.

"I need a sharp knife. This thing requires blood, too." A snap of his companion's fingers and Harry was looking at his potions knife. "I always forget I have this thing. Thanks, Dobby."

"Griphook was saying it needs just three drops, Master Harry."

Cutting his finger just enough to draw blood, the young wizard nodded at the house elf and carefully let three drops of blood fall into the square at the bottom of the parchment. The parchment suddenly rolled itself up and the seal mended itself, causing Harry to yip in surprise.

“Is that normal?”

“Oh yes,” Dobby assured him and healed his finger with a small burst of magic. “Magical parchments can be made to do that. Dobby will go finish errands. Yous is to be eating and Dobby will be back with yous dinner later tonight.”

“Yes, Mom,” Harry teased gently. “Go on. Don’t spend too much until I have some idea of what I have available to spend. I’ll eat. I promise.”

July 4th, The Burrow

“Are you writing to Harry?”

Hermione looked up at Ginny and smiled at the petite red head.

“It’s just the beginnings of what we’ve been finding out about the things in his letter. I have one ready for when Dobby comes back around, though. How about you?”

“I wrote a quick note out last night before I went to bed. It’s easier to keep track that way.” The younger girl sighed. “I’m scared, ‘Mione...what if we all have been Obliviated or worse? What do we do? Can we trust Healer Monroe to really help us?”

“Ron seems to feel comfortable with him, so I’m willing to give him something of a benefit of a doubt.” Squeezing her friend’s hand comfortingly, Hermione smiled a little.

“I’m nervous, too. It’s scary as hell for me to think that any one of us may have had our memories or behaviours altered. I mean, look at what an unskilled Obliviate did to Neville. I don’t blame you for being

scared, but we have to know, Ginny. We have to know if someone has done this to us, and if they have, then we have to try to fix it.”

Ginny nodded and hugged the older witch fiercely before stepping back with a cheeky grin.

“Now, missy bookworm. Put away that quill and parchment and go put on your swimsuit. It’s a great day and Luna and the boys are already down at the pond.”

Grinning, Hermione complied readily and headed up to the room she shared with Ginny to change clothes.

July 4th, Gringotts, Diagon Alley and Knockturn Alley

Griphook took the signed parchment to the appropriate department and retrieved the account statements, letter and books he had been ordered to provide. Placing everything into a bottomless, weight reducing satchel, he returned to his office and met the house elf’s open gaze.

“This satchel will hold most of your shopping for Lord Potter. I have already placed his account statements, some correspondence and several books that he may find enlightening inside it.”

He placed a smaller bag on the desk. “This is a money bag. Tell it the amount you need and it will fill itself accordingly up to 100 galleons at a time. Place your hand on the bag so that I can key it to you. It has already been keyed to Mr. Potter.”

“Thank you Mister Griphook.” Placing his hand on the bag as directed, Dobby felt a tingle of magic and drew the bag into his lap. “Is there anything Dobby is needing to tell Master Harry immediately?”

“Just make sure he reads his correspondence before he gets lost in the books and statements,” Griphook requested. “There is nothing that he has to respond to immediately, however. I am at your master’s disposal, so please come to me if there is anything I can do to help him.”

“Dobby will tell him you were very kind and helpful, Mister Griphook. I have much to do for him yet today.”

Finally done with his master's business at Gringotts, Dobby bounced down Diagon Alley to Flourish and Bott's for the more common books on his list, stopped at the Stationary shop to buy more parchment, ink and quills, then went into Eeylop's Owl Emporium to purchase owl treats for Hedwig.

Pausing to go over his list of things to do, Dobby nodded to himself and headed for Knockturn Alley and the shops that he knew would contain the rarer and more questionable items he would need to fulfil Harry's requests. For once, he was glad he had been the house elf to a bad master – knowing what his bad master did and had taught his son meant that Dobby could make sure the great Harry Potter could defend himself from other bad wizards. Seeing the store front for Borgin and Burkes, he scuttled in with a suddenly cowed air about him.

“Mister Borgin...master is sending me to pick up his things. Hims is wanting them now,” he forced out, eyes wide and scared looking. Wringing his hands, he moaned when the older wizard frowned at him.

“Please, Mister Borgin. If Master doesn't get his things, master will punish...”

“I thought Malfoy was still in Azkaban,” Borgin muttered at the cowering house elf. “You say he wants the things he ordered?”

“Master is home. Master is wanting what belongs to him. Hims is very angry still...hims will punish...”

“Oh shut your snivelling! Good thing he already paid or I'd have sold the stuff already as it is.”

Growling to himself about whiny elves and over bearing, stuck up aristocrats, Borgin snatched up the shrunken crate labelled with Lucius Malfoy's name and brought it out to the elf. A stack of books was waiting for him on the counter when he turned to look at it.

“What’s this?”

“More books for the young Master, Mr. Borgin...”

“Oh, very well. That’ll be 100 galleons.” Taking the money, Mr. Borgin watched the cowering creature place the loose books in a satchel, then toddle away with the shrunken package. “Crazy beast. Never understood why Malfoy bothers to keep that elf around. It’s completely nutters.”

Grinning wickedly, Dobby made a few more quick stops in little known and rarely visited shops, the last of which was a junk shop where he acquired a solid handful of wands. His master was vulnerable without a wand, so he was certain to make sure he found him a wand. Feeling quite good about his shopping trip, especially after having removed who knows what dark artefacts from the bad wizard’s control, Dobby dropped off the rest of Harry’s correspondence and popped over to Hogwarts to make dinner before returning to his Master’s side.

July 4th, Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

“The brat couldn’t possibly stay docile forever, Albus. He’s a bloody teenager!” Severus pointed out with an unhappy sneer. He’d been having such a lovely evening after the earlier interruption and now he was stuck entertaining Albus again. He couldn’t wait for morning when he had to leave on his hunt for potions ingredients. “I can see that he is trouble. Why can’t you see what I see?”

“Harry will be what he was born to be and nothing more, Severus. He knows the prophecy.” The aged headmaster sighed expressively, blue eyes hard behind his half moon spectacles. “Despite everything, he is a weapon of the Light. Everything I do is done to ensure that does not change. We need him to kill Voldemort.”

“I am curious what our plans for the Potter brat are.” Severus drawled his question, obsidian eyes glittering maliciously. “That is assuming, of course, that the little fool survives the summer. I don’t see how you

expect him to complete that task, personally. Are you so certain he is the chosen one of the prophecy?"

Dumbledore chuckled softly, the sound not comforting in the least. Twinkle at full blast, he tapped his steeped fingers on his chin and debated on how to answer.

"Amazing what dumb luck will allow you to survive, is it not? I am surprised that he has survived this long my self, quite honestly." He frowned. "He is the one. How else could he have survived a killing curse?"

Contemplating the dark wizard in the seat across from him, Albus smiled a bit. "We will deal with each event as it comes and concern ourselves with the end of the war once we get there."

A third, rough and raspy voice cut in to their conversation before Severus could reply to the Head Master's statements.

"All this talk of your supposed 'greater good' is fine and dandy for you, Head Master, but it means nothing in the grand scheme of things."

Eyeing the Sorting Hat warily, Severus felt a growing sense of rightness. Something was about to shift the balance and it was going to happen soon.

"Is there a new prophecy?" he inquired cautiously.

"Indeed there is." The battered old hat smiled and nodded, or so it seemed. "There is something you have not considered about the old prophecy beyond that fact that it does not in any way state that the defeater of the Dark Lord must be Light."

Albus' twinkle dimmed considerably. It was true – he had always assumed that his weapon would be lily white.

"But he's a Potter, from a centuries old line of Light wizards...how could he be anything but Light?"

“Sirius Black was a Grey wizard from an equally long line of Dark wizards,” Severus mused, his disdain for the other man still evident in his tone. “The history of the line does not preclude the occasional odd man out, as it were and Dark does not have to mean evil in any case.”

“Very good, Severus Snape. Ten points to Slytherin!” The hat beamed as it complimented the Head of Slytherin. The ancient artefact then managed to actually look secretive and shifty despite being a hat.

“I won’t allow Harry to go Dark,” Albus declared firmly.

“Only young Mr. Potter can make that decision, Albus. Remember my warning and do not over estimate yourself.”

“You said there was a new prophecy, Alister. What is it?”

“There are numerous new prophecies given on a regular basis. I am sure you are resourceful enough to find whichever ones may apply to your own sticky little problems.” Alister promptly resettled and went still, all appearances of life lost.

July 4th, # 4 Privet Drive

Harry ate his dinner and watched Dobby unload stacks of books out of a deceptively small satchel. Eyes widening at the sheer quantity of books, he shook his head in silent bemusement. A metal banded crate that reeked of dark magic was returned to its full size and he really started to get nervous.

“Um, Dobby...how much did you spend and where did you get all of this stuff?”

“Dobby was spending very little, Master Harry. Only 210 galleons.” Stymied by a lack of storage space, Dobby frowned. “There is no place for Dobby to be putting your library...”

“Maybe I need a trunk like Mad-Eye, one of those multi-compartment things,” Harry mused, then choked when Dobby opened the crate and

the seductive feel of dark magic washed out into the small room.
“Maybe I need it now...Dobby! Who’s on duty right now?”

A quick set of pops and the elf reappeared.

“Missy Tonks is watching, Master Harry.”

“I think I need that trunk now, Dobby. I just need it to have more than one compartment and I really need it to be charmed so that people like Moody and Dumbledore can’t see into it. If anyone finds out about all this stuff, I’ll be in seriously deep trouble!”

“Dobby is getting it, Master Harry!”

Groaning to himself once the little elf was gone, Harry left his dinner and started looking through everything Dobby had purchased. Finding titles like ‘Occlumency: The Fortress of the Mind’, ‘Moste Potente Potions’, ‘Rites, Rituals and Beyond’, and many more, he shook his head in quiet amazement. Every thing he had asked for and then some was here, and that thought drew him to that tempting crate of items. Filled with books and items that looked as dark and powerful as they felt, the young wizard took one look, shivered and decided to let those alone for now. He would start on all of this tomorrow once he had a clear head and the security of knowing that his belongings were safe.

July 5th, St. Mungo’s & The Ministry of Magic

Locking up his office, Master Healer Octavius Monroe headed for the Floo room and tossed some powder into the fireplace. Making sure he was alone, he drew on a grey, non-descript cloak and stepped into the fire.

“Ministry of Magic.”

Stepping out into the atrium with practiced grace, Octavius approached the security check point with no intention of stopping.

Sputtering, the Security Clerk at the Wand Registry Desk started to question the person who had just walked past him and then paled and returned to his duties once he recognized the cloak.

“Bloody Unspeakables,” he breathed and waited for someone else to come along.

More amused than anything, Octavius took the lift down to the deepest level of the Ministry, where it opened onto a small foyer and a black basalt door that was covered in runic symbols. Approaching the door, he paused when he felt the warning of the wards.

“Ordo Aeternum,” he murmured and stepped through.

“Isn’t it a bit late for you to be coming in this evening, Octavius?” teased a remarkably delicate and harmless looking young woman.

“I need to review some files. This case I’m working is far more complex than any of us anticipated.” Shedding his cloak, the Healer draped the garment over an empty chair and settled at his desk.

“The Weasley boy? Have you actually found something useful about the Brains?”

“That has actually become secondary to a much more important matter, but yes, I believe I may have found something about the Brains. The young man was a gifted strategist prior to the attack, but now he seems to have an incredibly evolved sense of...multiple possibilities on his own personal timeline. It’s remarkable and quite unsettling for young Mr. Weasley.”

“And your oh, so pressing issue?” The woman arched one finely arched, dark eyebrow at him and smirked, sea green eyes glittering with amusement.

“My current concern involves the Ministry six as a group.” Octavius sighed quietly. “It’s a primed powder keg of a cluster fuck, Mina. “

“How so?” Mina frowned, eyes darkening with concern. This was clearly eating at the Healer and she felt a need to help.

"It is more than vaguely possible that they have all been Obliviated illegally more than once as a best case scenario and subjected to behaviour modification spells at the minimal worst." Fuming, the Healer muttered under his breath for several long moments before finally regaining his composure. A wickedly nasty smirk twisted his mouth.

"If I find that it is true, I will be processing the paper work for legal action."

"Who do you think is responsible? It would have to be someone who had ready access..." Mina trailed off, eyes widening, then narrowing with obvious disapproval. "You think..."

"It has to be someone at the school and my expectations are running high, if you follow my meaning."

"Sweet Merlin, I hope you're wrong. Something like that would be a massive blow to the morale of the wizarding world."

"Don't worry, Mina. If my suspicions prove to be true, then I will confer with all of the children first. They will probably agree to leave it alone until the war is over so long as charges are pending...no matter how powerful the culprit may be."

"Which files do you need specifically?"

"Potter, Harry James. Weasley, Ronald Billius. Weasley, Ginevra Molly. Granger, Hermione Jane. Lovegood, Luna Wilhemina. Longbottom, Neville Frank." Letting out a weary sigh, Octavius shook his head at the stack of substantial files that appeared before him.

"This is going to be a long weekend. I hope we have plenty of tea on hand."

July 5th, # 4 Privet Drive

Reading through the account statements Dobby had retrieved for him confused Harry at first. There was so much information, so much

parchment to go through, that he was quickly getting lost in it. Having minimal experience with financial matters, and none at all for an estate of this magnitude, he groaned and started separating the parchments out by the individual vault numbers before trying to wade through the numbers yet again.

“Is this right? This can’t be right. I have to be reading it wrong or something...”

Smacking himself on the forehead, he looked at the ceiling and shook his head, a vague look of disgust on his face before he straightened and retrieved a few sheets of blank parchment and a ball point pen.

“Thank you for making me learn to revise properly, ‘Mione,” he muttered and went through each vault, scribbling notes as he went, the parchments soon resembling notes for a math class in a muggle school. Finally done looking through the six Potter family vaults and his trust vault, he sighed tiredly, green eyes focused on the header for each of the main vault statements.

“The Most Ancient and Noble House of Potter. No one ever bothered to mention that little tidbit of information.”

Taking a deep breath, he returned his attention to the notes he had taken and slowly let out a breath he’d been unaware of holding.

“Bloody hell!” Amazement washed over him as the sheer enormity of eight digits worth of pure monetary value sank in and made him giddy. Then the anger crept up on him with all the subtlety of a well hit bludger and his eyes flared brightly.

“You said you’d tell me everything, Dumbledore. What part of everything did you not understand?” he hissed, nearly lapsing into parseltongue in his angry ranting.

Translations:

Oc Dager -Goblin for Young Warrior

Sheklac -Goblin for Chieftain

“...But seduction isn’t making someone do what they don’t want to do. Seduction is enticing someone into doing what they secretly want to do already.”

Waiter Rant

July 5th, # 4 Privet Drive

Calming from his fit of temper, the only human magical resident of number four Privet Drive shot a resentful look at the pile of parchment that now served as much as a reminder of Dumbledore’s many betrayals as it served to remind him of how little he knew of his parents. Harry pulled the Gringotts satchel towards him and reached in to find the correspondence Dobby had mentioned to him the previous evening. Instead of parchment, his hand encountered a soft cloth bag that felt like it was full of sticks.

“Eh?”

Pulling out a plain brown pouch, Harry opened it and looked at its contents with wide eyes. Wands? His mind questioned. How did I get...oh.

“Dobby.”

“Yous is calling, Master Harry?”

“Yeah. Where did the wands come from? Please tell me you didn’t take them from Ollivanders or some...”

“Oh, no, Master Harry! Dobby finds them in a junk shop and bought them so the Great Harry Potter would have a wand. It is not being safe, yous wand being gone.”

Visibly relieved, Harry relaxed a bit and nodded his acceptance.

“I did say I needed a wand,” he murmured quietly. “Thanks Dobby. I just had to be sure. Um, you didn’t get them from a place like Borgin and Burkes, did you? That crate has enough dark stuff in it for me to go through...”

"The junk shop is way down off Knockturn Alley, Master. A little man with slanted eyes and funny accent sold them to me."

Amused by the idea that Dobby thought the clerk of the shop had a funny accent given his own eccentric way of speaking, Harry chuckled and nodded.

"Sounds fairly safe then, I guess."

"Is there anything else Dobby can be doing for you?"

"N-Yes, there is something." A slightly vindictive, more than a little angry glint sparked to life in the young man's green, green eyes.

"Find my old wand and my invisibility cloak, but do not retrieve them. I don't want Dumbledore or whoever Obliviated me to know I remember what happened that day. I just want to know who has my things and where they're being kept."

The elf vanished with a sharp nod of understanding.

Alone yet again, Harry cautiously poured the wands out onto his bed and looked them over for obvious damage. One looked like someone had given it to a baby or small animal as a chew toy and another had a spiral fracture that ran from the base to the tip. He winced, but figured he'd give them a careful wave at least, just to make sure it wasn't a complete loss.

"Might as well do it the Ollivander way," he muttered and picked up the chewed one to give it a wave. The wand felt dead in his hand and he dropped it back in the bag. The next couple of wands were just as bad and he began to worry that he would have to send Dobby out to another shop to find some more wands. He had been very difficult to match at eleven, so why should he have any more luck now?

"Beautiful," he whispered, eyes and hands drawn to one wand in particular, its glossy, deep red surface and intricate gold and silver inlay a breath taking sight only to be rivalled or surpassed by the reaction his magic had when he picked it up.

“Sweet Merlin!” His gasp was punctuated by a shower of red, gold, green and silver sparks, his arm jerking from the nearly painful, burning surge of magic that took full advantage of the call of this new wand to express its eagerness to be free. “Oh, that’s bloody perfect,” he whispered and his new wand seemed to agree as his magic settled into place and waited patiently for him to call it forth.

Wanting to be certain that he had not overlooked an equally good match, Harry tried the last few wands, but none gave him any more of a reaction than the calm sense of warmth he had come to associate with his original holly and phoenix feather wand.

Putting the bag of wands away in his new trunk, he devoted himself to a brief study of the unusually shaped, red lacquered wand – instead of being round or even a bit more squared off, it was hexagonal, like a quartz crystal. He admired the gold and silver inlay for a moment and tucked the wand away from prying eyes. He had correspondence to tackle.

July 5th, Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Focusing in on his master’s original wand, Dobby popped in and felt the item nearby. He looked at the desk drawer where he knew the item in question sat before looking up as Albus Dumbledore looked down at him with a frown. Immediately shifting gears, the elf smiled cheerfully and bounced merrily.

“Would yous be liking some tea and treacle tart, Head Master Dumbleydore?”

Surprised by the mad little elf’s sudden appearance, Albus frowned and studied the seemingly zoned out creature. He relented when the creature returned to its normal behaviour and offered him a snack.

“I think that would be delightful, Dobby. That’s exactly what I need.”

Vanishing to fetch the treat for the elderly wizard, Dobby forced himself to not gnash his teeth around one of the bad wizards who hurt his Master. If it would help his Master, he could wait to punish

Dumbledore. Delivering the tray to the Head Master with a happy bounce, he moved on to finding Harry's invisibility cloak.

Savouring the sweetness of his tart, Dumbledore looked over at the ornate perch near his desk and wondered where Fawkes was off to. It was surprising that he had not returned to at least visit since his Master's return from the Ministry. Shrugging it off as unimportant for the time being, he settled in to read the legislation he would be required to vote on at the next Wizengamot session.

Unnoticed from his position, the charred but recognizable remains of his letter to the Dursleys lay in the ash basin of his phoenix's perch.

July 5th, Somewhere in Knockturn Alley

Homing in on the invisibility cloak proved to be a bit more of a challenge than Dobby had originally anticipated. The target location kept changing right about the time that the little elf would get enough of a fix to be able to pop in. Finally, after a rather frustrating and stimulating hours long chase, Dobby managed to pop in behind the individual who was carrying Harry's cloak.

Senior Auror Kingsley Shacklebolt paused in a dark alcove to survey a section of Knockturn Alley he had just been sent to investigate for Death Eater activity. After having to apparate all over London to do follow-up reports on the Junior Aurors under his command, he was truly grateful to actually be working.

He frowned and looked around, his well trained combat sense telling him he was being watched. Seeing nothing because he failed to look down, the Auror simply shook the feeling off and went back to the business of looking out for Death Eaters.

Recognizing the tall, black auror even before he turned around, Dobby vanished. This was very disturbing news and he was not looking forward to sharing it with his Master. He hated to see the kind young wizard upset and this news was going to do just that.

July 5th, # 4 Privet Drive

After managing to fish his mail out of the seemingly bottomless satchel, Harry moved himself to his desk where he had writing materials available in case he needed to compose a reply. Opening the first letter, he settled in and began to read.

Mr. Harry James Potter,

Having been recently notified of your inability to receive owl post, we at Gringotts must inquire as to the last date you were able to receive unimpeded correspondence so that any pertinent reports or requests can be forwarded to you via your Gringotts Mail Pouch.

Please reply at your earliest convenience so that I can begin processing your mail.

Potter Estate Account Manager,

Griphook

Contemplating that short but direct letter, the young wizard decided to be just as direct. Searching his memory, he found no recollections of having received any mail from Gringotts. He wasn't sure if he was supposed to have received any prior to these letters, so he decided to play it safe in his reply.

Mr. Griphook,

Thank you for the offer to update me on any missed Gringotts correspondence. Unfortunately, as your letters are the first correspondence I have ever received from the Goblins, I am uncertain where you would need to start.

I assume that my account statement covers the important points, but if there is more I need to be aware of, please send it to me when it is convenient to do so.

Still in your debt,

Harry James Potter

Harry opened the next letter from Gringotts and had tears running down his face when he contemplated the fact that the reading of Sirius' will made it real – it meant he wasn't coming back.

...We offer our sincere condolences for the loss of your Godfather and guardian, Sirius Orion Black...

The goblins wouldn't allow the will to be read if they weren't somehow completely certain that he was beyond reach. He would really have to be dead for them to send him this letter. Wouldn't he?

Your presence is requested for a private reading of the Black will within two weeks after your sixteenth birthday...

Harry slowly composed himself before writing his reply.

Mr. Griphook,

I hope that this question doesn't offend you, but how do you know Sirius is dead? He fell through the Veil and there didn't seem to be anything wrong with him. They never retrieved the body...how do you know he's really gone?

Putting his quill down, Harry buried his face in his hands and took deep, calming breaths. He hadn't realized how much hope he'd placed in the thought that Sirius might make it back somehow. He escaped from the supposedly inescapable Azkaban, so why not the Veil? Scrubbing his face free of tears, he returned to his letter and forced himself to finish it.

Barring any unforeseen circumstances, I will arrive at Gringotts on Saturday, August 3rd at 10 in the morning for the private reading of my Godfather's will. If a different date and time would be more convenient, then please notify me so I can make plans for the change.

As I have never had the chance to read my parent's will, would it be possible for me to view that as well? I don't even know if they had one, but I think it might help me to put some things behind me.

Thank you,

Harry James Potter

Addressing both letters to Griphook as his Account Manager, Harry placed his replies in the mail pouch and flopped down on his bed, fingers toying with his replacement wand. The slick lacquer felt oddly reassuring as he traced the gold and silver designs with his fingertips. After much lazy contemplation, he recognized the stylized bird as a phoenix and soon decided that the serpentine silver inlay was a Basilisk since he wasn't sure what type of serpent it was meant to depict. Clutching the wand to his chest like a lifeline, he let his thoughts roam.

"What's everyone else up to today?" he mused aloud. So far, their letters had been full of the usual teenaged summer fun that he knew existed at the Burrow and he knew it was meant to reassure him, but in fact, he envied them bitterly. They had freedom, however limited it might be. They had never been trapped like this, caged like Dumbledore had done to him for years and Sirius before him.

So, are you going to lie there and feel sorry for yourself, or are you going to make use of that lovely new wand? The voice he'd come to associate with his Slytherin side chose that moment to speak up, startling him into an undignified 'Ahh!' Boy, are you jumpy.

What the bloody hell?! Who are you?

Your Slytherin side, of course. Had you forgotten me already? The voice actually sounded hurt.

How could I possibly forget that I hear voices in my head? Was the sarcastic reply. Is that you, Tom? 'Mione was right. It is bad to hear voices in your head. This proves it. He considered the conversation so far and came to the solid conclusion that he knew the person he was speaking with. Your voice sounds awfully familiar...

Why would this 'Tom' individual take the time to talk to you? Maybe the voice is familiar because it's your own voice...

Frowning while he considered that unlikely possibility, Harry reached for the place in his mind where a metaphysical doorway connected his mind to Voldemort's. Locating it, he checked to see if it was open or closed and found it to be slightly ajar.

That is possible, he admitted. But I'll just check this pesky door first, if that's okay with you, Tom. If I close this, are you going to be trapped over here with me? He put pressure on the door as if he were going to push it closed.

Now, my Little Serpent, there is no need to be hasty or rude. I'm not even hurting you. Voldemort exerted some pressure of his own to keep the door open for the time being. He hadn't expected the brat to catch on to his game this quickly, but that just added to the excitement of the game.

Why do you call me that? Harry hesitated mostly because what Tom said was true – his scar was tingling a bit, but it definitely did not hurt. And why are you in my head?

You are a parseltongue and there is so much in you that Salazar would have been proud to welcome into his House, so you are my Little Serpent. Tom sighed and tried to think of a suitable reason for being in the boy's head since he wasn't really sure why he was there himself. He decided a non-answer might be the safest path to take for the moment.

Fighting unprepared children is such a boring prospect for someone like me, for someone like you. No, I much prefer to face off against fully prepared witches and wizards. They tend to be so much more gratifying in the challenge they present, don't you think?

Riiight. Harry snorted gracelessly and wondered where Tom pulled things like that up from.

Such sarcasm, Little Serpent. Surely you gained far more fulfilment from duelling against my dear Bella and to a standstill no less, than you have ever gained from your juvenile scuffles with the Malfoy heir. Tom felt the jolt of that comment hitting home and practically purred

his satisfaction. Oh, yes, there was hope for his Little Serpent, after all.

That statement silenced Harry for a long moment. How could he deny the truth of those damning words when he had, indeed, felt more powerful and full of life during that duel than at almost any other time of his life.

Alright, I concede your point, Tom. Now, why exactly are you here, talking to me in my head?

Your wand is surely unregistered, my Little Serpent. Now you can study properly. Please do study, Harry. Learn everything you can and finish destroying all of those annoying blocks on your magic. I am waiting for you, Little Serpent. I am so eagerly waiting...

That just sounds sick and obsessed, as usual, Tom! If you're going to drop in to talk or 'encourage' me to get ready for our future duels, then have something specific in mind to talk about. If you're just here to taunt me, then get out, you crazy bastard.

Harry shoved at the intruder with a sharp burst of power and felt him leave with a cackle of high pitched, cold laughter that was abruptly cut off when the door slammed shut between them. He stared at the offending portal, the door that either of them could open and contemplated trying to block it over or lock it up.

Though he hated to admit it, Tom had never lied to him or manipulated him in ways that he wasn't capable of seeing if he looked for it. Tom manipulated him into duels, into untenable situations, because that was what a Dark Lord did to his rival. He sighed and tried to ignore the part of his mind and soul that looked forward to the day when he would face the older wizard as an equal. That part of him would never allow the door to be locked.

July 5th, Unplottable Location

Eyes opening as his consciousness was abruptly shoved back into his own mind, Voldemort winced and rubbed his forehead, mental

eye still focused with baleful intensity on the door that led to the mind of his fiercest rival.

Bold, cheeky and insolent brat. It's my job to cause headaches, not his, he muttered to himself even as a ghost of a smile curved his thin lips. He didn't say don't come back. He just said have a purpose when I do return. Know thine enemy, my little Serpent.

Contemplating the growing strength, and therefore, the growing threat posed by The Boy Who Bloody Wouldn't Die, he relaxed into his executive style desk chair and propped his booted feet up on the desktop.

Did he feel something for the brat besides rivalry and hate? Was that why the boy had changed from the Potter brat to his little Serpent? What did that mean in the greater scope of his plans? He sighed restlessly and shook his head. He didn't know for sure how he felt about the whole situation, but one thing was certain – if the boy refused to side with him, then his life would be forfeit. For now, he would focus on seducing the powerful child away from the Light and on other, more pressing issues like the retrieval of his Inner Circle from Azkaban.

I'll give him truth and I'll give him knowledge and the Light's own Saviour will sow more chaos than I could ever hope to do alone. He knows the bitter stench of betrayal...he has been fed on the meagre fare of lies...Let the seduction begin.

July 5th, Gringotts Bank

A chime sounded in his small office and Griphook turned his attention to his In Box. Finding two letters waiting, he picked them up and opened the first. Reading it, he growled under his breath and planned another visit to Ragnok. It was a direct violation of several treaty amendments, not to mention the rights of the client, to deny them their official banking correspondence. Making notes to him self on his desk organizer, the goblin carefully re-folded the letter and set it to the side.

Sheklac Ragnok,

There are new developments with the Chosen One's situation and this Oc Dager feels the need for your wisdom in dealing with the situation. Please let me know when it is convenient to meet with you.

Potter Estate Account Manager,

Oc Dager Griphook

Dropping the short note into his Out Box, where it promptly vanished, Griphook proceeded on to the next letter. He made note of the date and time the boy stated he would arrive so he could confirm it if need be, then froze. If he had thought the issue of misdirected mail was bad, the issue regarding the Potter will was worse. If the boy had been denied the right to see or even know of the existence of his parent's will, then what else was wrong? He would respond to the boy's concerns about the proof they had regarding his Godfather's death at a later time. A summons to Ragnok's office appeared and he scurried out, letters in hand.

"What new issues have come up, Griphook?"

Bowing slightly to his chieftain, Griphook gathered his thoughts and responded.

"The Chosen One has received no correspondence from Gringotts, Sheklac. None at all before the two letters I sent to him via his house elf. Then I find out through his second letter that he has never seen his parents will. He doesn't even know for sure that they have one." He handed the two short letters to the goblin chieftain.

"The Potter will was executed shortly after their death, or it should have been. Begin a full investigation into the matter and alert Mr. Potter of what we are doing and why. Get to the bottom of this, Griphook. We cannot afford mistakes of any kind with an account of this magnitude. I am authorizing you to perform a full audit on the Potter and Dumbledore accounts, and make sure to closely investigate the Potter will."

July 5th, # 4 Privet Drive

Returning to the smallest bedroom at number four Privet Drive with lunch for his young master, Dobby conjured a small table and placed the meal before him. He waited, fidgeting nervously, for the questions he knew were to come.

Still a bit preoccupied after his recent encounter with Tom, Harry frowned at the elf's unusual behaviour, tilted his head to one side and tried to figure out what had him so upset. He quickly gave up.

"What's wrong, Dobby?"

"Dobby is finding your old wand and cloak..."

"Well, that's good news. They haven't snapped my wand, have they?"

"Oh, no, Master Harry! Your wand feels whole and is in Dumbledore's desk."

"And my cloak?" The whereabouts of his wand came as absolutely no surprise, and was barely enough to spark his anger at this point. He had expected it.

"Mister Shacklebolt is having it..."

"Kingsley?" Harry's eyes narrowed as he thought about the scenario that had led to his 'capture' and return to Privet Drive newly Obliviated and short his wand and cloak. "A Senior Auror would be more than capable of taking me down fast enough that I wouldn't know who had done it...that does sound just about right." His lips twisted into an almost feral smirk. "Kingsley and I will have to discuss this one on one in the near future."

Monday, July 8th, St. Mungo's, Office of Master Mind Healer Octavius Monroe

Beckoning Ron into his office, Healer Monroe returned his gaze to the file that lay open on his desk. Further movement seen out of the corner of his eye made him blink and jerk his head up with a startled sound, the sight of five very intense looking young people facing his

desk enough to remind him of how foolish he had been to let his guard down. If only half of what he knew about their exploits in the Department of Mysteries was correct then these were not wizards and witches he wanted to have on his bad side. You're getting lazy, there, old man. Don't let it happen again. Regaining his composure, he thanked Merlin that they weren't there out for his blood.

"The Ministry Five, since your leader is missing," he mused and nodded to acknowledge them before conjuring sufficient seating for the unexpected arrivals. "I admit that I was expecting Mr. Weasley and Mr. Longbottom, but the rest of you are a bit of a surprise. What brings you to my office?"

"We need to know if we have spells cast on us," Ginny stated bluntly, brown eyes full of worry. "There are things we've all seen that are important. Have any of us been Obliviated or worse?"

"All of us need to know," Ron explained, tone earnest. "Just knowing that something might be missing...it just doesn't feel right."

"We are all the support that Harry has at the moment," Luna stated, her gaze unusually clear and direct. "That will change in the future, but for now, we're it. So, will you help us, or do we leave now and claim this was all a big prank to get you going?"

Momentarily nonplussed, Octavius studied Luna as intently as she was studying him. Nodding to himself, he smiled a little and made mental note to read the young woman's file again.

"I will do what I can, Miss Lovegood." He then studied each one of the teens for a long moment before speaking again.

"I will need to perform a revealing spell before I can do anything else. All it does is let me know if there are any lingering or long term spell castings on your person. I will be checking for Obliviation, blocks, compulsions...the whole bag. Do any of you object to that?"

“That’s a lot to check for. Do you have to do this often?” Hermione was clearly intrigued by the scope of the spell in question, as well as its implied necessity.

“It’s fairly standard practice for anyone who has had prolonged contact with the enemy,” the Mind Healer replied. “That includes all Aurors who have been around the Death Eaters for more than direct duelling and anyone who was captured, regardless of how long they were missing. In your cases, you spent a lot of time in contact with Inner Circle Death Eaters, not all of it centred on duelling. Although I am fairly sure you don’t think they had anything to do with your issues, that one fact gives me the necessary reasoning that I would need for my superiors to understand and approve of your treatment alongside Mr. Weasley.”

Seeing no other questions or concerns for the moment, Octavius cast with a complex series of wand motions and directed his wand at each one of them before stabbing it sharply at a stack of parchments on his desk.

“Acclaro obliviosus iugum obligatio oppressos!”

Leaving the parchments undisturbed for the moment, Healer Monroe shrugged nonchalantly.

“Now we let the spell do its work. This will also give me a decent copy of the magical signature of the person who cast the spells if there are, indeed any on you.”

“So, it doesn’t tell you who did it, but if you have a suspect, it will help you prove it?” Ginny sat forward eagerly.

“Indeed, that is the idea, Miss Weasley. Obviously, we already know the identity of the idiot who cast the obliviate on Mr. Longbottom, so that is a moot point. However, if what Mr. Weasley told me of your friend’s dream is true and that signature is the same for any and all spells, then we have a much more impressive case.”

Octavius sighed. “I will, however, burst your bubble now in case this turns out to be a worst case scenario. If the caster was strong enough

or knowledgeable enough to properly cover their tracks, we may not be able to identify them this way.”

“Especially if they’re both of the above,” Neville muttered unhappily. “Thanks for being up front about it, Healer Monroe.”

“That is the least I can do, Mr. Longbottom. All right, these seem to have settled down, so give me a moment to look them over before we begin discussing them.” Scanning through the small stack of parchments, Healer Monroe growled softly, hazel eyes sparking angrily before he was able to recover his composure completely.

“You found something,” Ron stated quietly. He shifted nervously in the face of the usually calm healer’s loss of composure. “How bad is it?”

“Well, either Miss Lovegood sloughs spells like water off a duck’s back or none have been cast on her to date, so either way, that is a good bit of news,” Octavius pronounced.

“I only recently joined the group and no one takes me seriously, anyway,” Luna mused in her standard dreamy tone. “But then, they don’t take the Crumple-horned Snorkack seriously either, so I’m not terribly surprised.”

Hermione grinned knowingly when the healer’s face went blank to cover his amusement.

“What about the rest of us?”

“Mr. Weasley has a compulsion charm on him that appears to be designed to prevent him from discussing several events, but that seems to be all.” Flipping to the next page, Octavius focused on Ginny.

“Miss Weasley has a very strong compulsion focused on a period of time instead of just a particular event, which makes me very curious as to what was going on. There is also the residue of a failed obliviation and an aborted bonding spell of some kind.”

Ginny paled and slumped in her seat a little bit, her brown eyes growing shiny as tears threatened to fall. Her mouth worked but the words refused to come out, until a supreme effort that resulted in visible pain allowed her to say one word.

"Tom..."

Hermione shifted over to kneel before the younger girl and gathered her into a fierce hug. Rocking her gently, Hermione nodded at the healer to continue.

"Shhh, Ginny, just cry. It's okay to cry about it. It must have been awful..."

"I take it this is a serious event that most of you are aware of, yes?"

"It's about The Chamber of Secrets, I think," Luna mused quietly. "I wasn't involved but it was an awful year for everyone at Hogwarts. Ginny and Harry had it worse than anyone, though."

"I'll keep that in mind for later discussion, perhaps." Octavius sighed heavily and looked to the next parchment. Looking it over again in an effort to focus his own thoughts, he finally looked up and directed his gaze to Neville.

"You also have a mild compulsion charm on you to prevent discussion of at least a few events beyond the obvious reason I had hoped to see you here. That does however appear to be all that was cast on you."

"Well, that's good at least." Neville reached over to awkwardly pat Ginny on the shoulder. "It'll be okay, Ginny. We won't let you down."

Ginny just nodded and slowly sat back from Hermione's sheltering embrace, her hands rising to swipe the tears from her face. Sniffing quietly, the fiery red head took a deep breath and slowly let it out.

"Well, that was interesting," she muttered with weak sarcasm. "Who's next?"

Hermione laughed a little and returned to her seat.

"I'm the last one. Hit me with your best shot, Doc."

Eyeing the bushy haired witch with a quizzical expression, Healer Monroe finally gave in and asked since he wasn't sure what she meant by that statement.

"Excuse me, Miss Granger? I'm to do what?"

Giggling merrily over the look on the older wizard's face, Hermione shook her head and catalogued it for future reference.

"It's a muggle saying that means 'say what you need to say', among other things."

"Oh. All right, then." Octavius picked up Hermione's parchment and sighed. "You have the expected compulsion regarding quite a few events, like Mr. Weasley, but yours is far stronger than I might have expected. You are also under the effects of deteriorating loyalty and trust compulsions. I'm not sure what is causing them to break down, but they are doing so, which makes them that much easier to remove."

"Harry is going to blow up his house over this one," Ginny muttered just loud enough for everyone present to hear her. "I just wish I could be there to see the looks on the...those muggles faces when it happens."

"That or he'll freeze everyone out. Either way, it would be entertaining as long as it isn't us he's freezing out," Hermione pointed out. "Can you teach us the detection spell, or is there a less complex one that will focus on compulsions and obliviation since that seems to be the biggest problem between the lot of us?"

"I can teach you the full spell if you like, but it is easier and less costly on your magic to narrow the types of spells it searches for. The incantation is simple enough, the short version being *Acclaro obliviosus iugum*. Are you ready for the wand movement?" At Hermione, Ginny and Neville's nod, he demonstrated and spent

several minutes correcting their execution before smiling his satisfaction.

“That should give you some sense of security and an early warning system of sorts. Now, how much longer do you think the bunch of you can stay today? The removal of the compulsion charms could take a while and I’d rather avoid being interrupted.”

“Hermione is staying with us at the Burrow for the summer and Mum knows we’re all here, so she should be fine with however long it takes. What about you two?” Ron directed his question at Neville and Luna.

“I told Gran I was coming up here to visit Mom and Dad and that I would probably be talking to a Mind Healer, so she expects to see me when I get home as long as it’s before dark,” Neville replied with a little grin.

“No hurry with me, either.”

“Dad knows where I am and why. Take your time,” Luna pronounced with a quirky little grin.

Octavius started with Ginny because the charms were the most complex and had the highest amount of power put into them. Using several interesting looking crystal devices and a great deal of complex spell work, the next half hour passed in a blur for the Mind Healer.

Finally, he felt the spells unravelling and attacked them with renewed vigour, his triumphant cry eliciting a round of laughter from the fascinated and stressed teens. Slumping in his seat, he threw mock glares at them for their laughter.

“You should try getting through some of these spells before you laugh. Merlin’s beard, whoever cast those spells meant you to never think about these events again, let alone talk about them to anyone.” He sighed explosively and took a small sip of a pepper-up potion.

“How do you feel, Miss Weasley?”

“I would very much like to go hide somewhere and cry for a month, but I’ll be okay until I get home,” Ginny whispered, tears already tracking down her pretty face despite her brave statement.

“Just get these things off of my friends so we can talk about what we’ve all been through together.”

Octavius nodded solemnly and refocused on the remaining four teens. Centring himself, he went to work on each compulsion in turn, pausing only to take the occasional sip of restorative potion. It was important for these young people to be able to share their experiences with each other and he’d be damned if he was going to let anything get in the way of that healing process – a healing that was obviously too long denied already.

“Done with that,” he croaked out after another hour plus of steady spell work. Clearing his throat, he sighed and wiped sweat from his forehead. “Damn, I need a drink...”

“Thank you for everything you’ve done, Healer Monroe.” Neville nodded his acknowledgement.

“You are quite welcome, Mr. Longbottom. Now, on to something that should be very important to all of you.”

Octavius shifted to sit up straight in his chair despite his exhaustion. “All of you have suffered at least one severe emotional trauma in recent time and have been given no help in dealing with the problems that can arise. Have any of you spoken to someone about the events at the Ministry, besides Ronald of course?”

Seeing only negative answers, he sighed and shook his head.

“All of you could have died and several of you experienced losing Mr. Black through the Veil, so it is understandable that you have not spoken of it. A combat situation like what you experienced at the Ministry is one example of when an Auror would be required to visit a Mind Healer.” Healer Monroe smiled.

"It may take several visits for all of you to work through how these events have affected you and I do need to spend some time working with Neville, as well, so why don't we keep this simple."

"Simple, sir?" Ron asked cautiously.

"Yes," Octavius replied with a wink. "Simple. All of you should have been sent to me, anyway, and I recommend group sessions to speed your recovery. As tightly knit as you are, it might not work any other way."

"Of course," Hermione whispered. "Post-traumatic stress...we should have had counselling like this in first year and second year..."

"Try every year," Ginny joked half-heartedly. "It will be good to get it out in the open."

"Excellent." Filing away the other references the teens had made for future sessions, Octavius made a mental note to definitely update some notes in their files. "When are the best days for the lot of you to come in together?"

"Any days seem to be good right now," Ron mused. "Can we keep my usual days? Mondays and Wednesdays?"

"I'll mark it down on my calendar and see you all again on Wednesday, then. Please let your erstwhile leader know that I am available to him if he needs a Mind Healer to speak with or if he needs help with problems like your own."

July 8th, # 4 Privet Drive

"Yous Granger is calling. Dobby will be right back, Master Harry. Is there anything yous needs while Dobby is out?"

"No, I think I'm okay for now, Dobby. I'll probably start in on those goblin books that Griphook sent over in the satchel. Go find out what Hermione wants." True to his word, Harry dragged out the first of the large tomes and examined the heavy leather cover.

“Goblins: From the Outside Looking In by Ambrosius Reginald Evans. I wonder...” His musings were temporarily cut off as his eyes continued to read through an inscription just below the author’s name. Recognizing it as a spell just as he finished reading it to him self, Harry felt a tingle rush across his skin. Cursing his possible stupidity, he blinked – the inscription was gone. Now he was wary of the books, but since he didn’t feel ill or hurt, so he decided to be more careful with the rest of the books and opened the cover.

“So much for Constant Vigilance, eh? Oh well, I won’t find anything out if I don’t take a chance...”

Dobby returned to find his young master deeply engrossed in a large book. Marvelling at how much faster than usual he seemed to be reading, the little elf just watched for a few minutes before attempting to get Harry’s attention.

“Master Harry, sir?”

“Hmmm?”

“Dobby has a letter for you from your Granger and your friends. It is on the bed beside you. Dinner will be ready a little later.” The little elf cocked his head to one side when Harry raised his head to look at him with intensely focused green eyes. “Is you well, Master Harry?”

“I feel fine, Dobby. Just let me know when you arrive with dinner if I’m still reading. Thank you for picking up the letter from the gang.” Reluctantly putting the book on goblin culture aside, Harry picked up the letter from his friends and began to read.

Harry,

It’s Thursday the 4th and I’ve done some research on mind control spells. I am simply horrified at the sheer number of spells... Luna says it’s the nature of humans to control the world around them, including their fellow man and I know she’s right, but it still upsets me.

I couldn’t have found every single spell of this type, even with Bill finding books for me. I just don’t want to believe it’s that long of a list.

Yes, I know Bill is an Order member, but please don't get upset about my asking him for help. I told him I was doing an extra credit report for Advanced Charms and that I had gotten the idea from Professor Moody's demonstrations in fourth year Defence Class. He didn't ask any more questions and seemed to think it was a good subject since the Ministry needs talented Obliviators.

Harry chuckled over that. Who would question the idea of Hermione doing extra credit work, no matter how unusual the subject matter might seem? He didn't like that she had involved Bill, but she seemed to have needed his help, so he supposed it was okay. He'd bring it up once he had the chance to talk to her face to face.

Ron spoke with Healer Monroe about your dream as a hypothetical situation and found out that it is fairly common for a focused mind, like that found in a practitioner of Occlumency, to have such a representation of the wizard's inner core and mind. It sounds like Voldemort told you the truth and that worries me more than the other things he's done. What does he gain by helping you?

I hear you, 'Mione. It's scary because Dumbledore should be the one telling me the truth, but he isn't. It's my mortal enemy who tells me the truth. It's my enemy who encourages me to do better... He sighed his frustration and shrugged it off for now. I guess the work I did do on Occlumency did some good after all.

The bricked up area in the floor is most likely your access to your magical core, so it's imperative that you get that unblocked! Windows and other openings like doors tend to lead to memories and gifts, magical abilities if you will. To have them blocked with bars and chains and things like that made the healer think of memory and heritage suppression charms as well obliviation. I really hope you can get a book on the subject to help you work through everything.

Healer Monroe also commented on the fact that many magical families, especially the older ones have special things they are very good at, talents and abilities that are known to belong to that bloodline and as an example, Parseltongue is a very rare and selective Blood Trait. Only one bloodline is known to manifest it

reliably and I'll give you three guesses which line that is, but the first two guesses don't count.

Yeah, only one bloodline – Slytherin. Except, I'm not blood related to Slytherin, so I must be the exception to yet another so called rule. Harry groaned and continued reading.

Okay that's all for now. I'll finish this once we've all gone to visit with the mind Healer. Ron trusts him and I am hoping he can shed some light on a few subjects.

Okay, it's Monday the 8th and we've all just gotten back from talking with the healer. I'm only going to put my comments down because the rest want to add notes, too.

I was under a compulsion to not talk about events that happened in our various adventures and also had a trust and loyalty charm placed on me. Healer Monroe isn't sure why, but those charms were deteriorating for some reason. He removed them and I can't express with words how much better it feels to be able to discuss the things we've been through. Oh! He also has us coming back as a group for trauma and stress counselling. I wish you could be there with us, Harry. Hey...!

Hey mate!

It's Ron, if you hadn't guessed. 'Mione didn't want to give up the quill, but I promised to give it back in a while. The spells to keep us quiet are gone and Healer Monroe has us all coming in to work through the 'trauma'. I suppose it can't hurt.

He said to tell you he's available if you need to talk to a Mind Healer or if you need help with those spells that are on you still. Ginny wants the quill, so I'll write more later.

Making mental note of the healer's name, Harry filed the offer away for future consideration. After everything he'd been through, it probably wouldn't hurt to go talk to a healer at some point.

It's so weird, Harry! I couldn't even think about Tom and the Chamber before this afternoon...and now it's all there, fresh and brand new practically. If...when we see each other next, can we...can we sit down and talk. About the Chamber and Tom, I mean...No one else can understand what happened like you can. You and I are the only ones who have lived through something like this...

Try not to blow up about all this, Harry. We'll get whoever did it, even if it is Dumbledore, and we'll do it TOGETHER.

I hope you're doing okay, as okay as you can be around those people. Write back soon!

Ginny

Stunned, the teenager just sat there and reread that small paragraph a few times before the words finally began to sink in. As much as he wanted to focus on the events of the Chamber, it was still difficult and not very clear.

"That's one I really need to work on," he muttered to himself. How could I have not noticed that I didn't think about those things unless I had no choice?

Hi Harry, Neville here. Healer Monroe says he may be able to lessen some of the effects of Lockhart's obliviation but he refuses to let me get my hopes up until he manages some progress , so I think I can live with that.

How are you doing? Keep your spirits up. Luna swears you'll Awaken this birthday and that's a really big deal for us wizards, so I hope it happens. If you need any information on what to expect from your Maturity, send Dobby and I'll lend you a book about it. Later.

Neville's right, Harry. Your aura was turning all sorts of pretty colours by the time school let out and it was getting brighter every day. You should have a powerful maturity, so make sure you read up on it and Twisted Claw Niblumpers, too.

Luna

Laughing harder than he'd laughed in weeks, Harry shook his head at Luna's well meant warning about a strange creature that only she was aware of. He sighed and decided to take Neville up on the offered book loan. He had at least one book on the subject stashed in his new trunk, but Neville's might have different information in it. He knew that Luna tended to be an odd girl, but she saw the world through different eyes. If she said he was going to have his magical maturity on his birthday, then he'd take her word for it until nothing happened.

"Good old Luna..."

Sweet Merlin, Harry! I didn't think I was ever going to get my quill back! I thought a group letter would be practical since we're all here, but my goodness...let us know if there is something we can do to help or if you need anything. I know our reach is limited, but we'll do what we can. It's not like we're doing anything besides homework and de-gnoming the yard anyway.

Stay healthy and as safe as you can!

Hermione

Reading back through the letter again, Harry smiled to himself and felt a little bad about his resentful thoughts a few days prior. It wasn't their fault he was stuck where he was. Debating on how to reply, he vacillated between short, individual letters and one mass reply. Seeing as they had written him one big letter, he figured that should work for a reply, too.

Hello everyone!

A group letter gets big, long little bits to everyone reply! Thanks for finding out what you did about the room from my dream. As disturbing as it is to know that Tom is telling me the truth about things like that, I am still glad to know about it. Hermione would be the first to tell me that knowledge is power and knowledge is the only way to survive this war we're stuck in.

I have managed to clear out a lot of the spells on the walls in the room, but it was your letter that let me focus on some of the more resistant spells. I had no idea that I couldn't talk about second year...I still can't talk about several things, but I'm working on getting through the mess. I have my core opened up about halfway, and I pick away at it every day.

Yes, Ginny, I would like to sit down and talk about what happened with Tom and all of that. It would probably help both of us a lot and it might help everyone else understand if they know what happened.

Dobby mentioned that I was going to be growing into my power soon, so I think Luna may be right about whatever this Awakening is. I have a book on Magical Maturity, but I will be sending Dobby by to borrow that book, if you don't mind, Nev. I'd rather have too much information than not enough. Tell Luna I'll keep an eye out for the Twisted Claw Niblumpers, too.

Please send my thanks to Healer Monroe, both for what he is doing for you guys, and for his offer to help me. Once I get the chance to move around more freely, I intend to drop in for a chat. It certainly couldn't hurt anymore than trying to work through things on my own.

I don't know what you guys have access to, but it might be helpful to know more about Fudge and what he's up to. We all know he's going to come after me, or even all of us, so it would be nice to be able to shoot back for once. Also think about what you might want to learn in the DA. Our luck with DADA teachers is so wretched that I doubt this year will be much better than last, so we might as well keep ourselves ready.

Harry

Rolling up his reply, Harry tied it closed and set it aside for Dobby to deliver whenever he return with dinner. Picking up the book on goblin culture once again, he smiled and began to read. The style was easy to follow and intensely engaging, making him wonder how the author came to know so much about the goblins.

“Why couldn’t Binns have used a book like this for the section on goblin culture? This, I’d have stayed awake for.” Laughing a little, he was soon engrossed in the tome and lost sense of everything but the subject at hand. One passage caught his attention and he filed it away in case he ever landed in a similar situation.

...Goblins are fiercely devoted to their mates and it is considered very bad form for a non-goblin male to address a married female in any way beyond a silent nod or possibly a slight bow. On one visit to the lower caverns, I was accompanied by a companion who did not heed my repeated warnings on this subject. He insisted upon trying to speak to the wife of the elder who was our guide and after being warned away, made the gravest error in trying to touch her to get her attention. His carcass is still adorning a pike somewhere in the common square, of this I am certain...

Whistling quietly to himself, Harry shook his head and read on, only to find himself at the end of the first book. Grinning his triumph, small though it might be, he set it down on the bed and stretched in the waning light.

Have I been reading that long? Dobby should be here soon...

No sooner had he thought the little elf’s name did Dobby appear with a tray loaded with his favourite foods and a small pitcher of pumpkin juice.

“Hi, Dobby. I didn’t think I’d read that long. Dinner smells good.”

“Yous is welcome, Master Harry. Was it being a good book?” Dobby asked as he set the tray up on the small table he used for meals. The young wizard seemed to be in better spirits today and that observation made the little elf smile.

“Yeah, it was very good. A lot of things the goblins do make more sense now, and I’m hoping the rest of the books are this easy to read. They were written by an Evans and I kind of wonder if he might have been some distant relation to my mum’s family.”

"It is good that they is helping you understand the goblins. Maybe you should be asking Mister Griphook about this Mister Evans. Maybe hims would know," the elf suggested. "You read yous goblin mail today?"

"I read it and put my replies in the mail pouch."

"Eat yous dinner then, and Dobby will check to see if you has any more goblin mail."

Harry started in on his meal with teenage enthusiasm, though he doubted he'd be able to finish the large meal his elfin friend had prepared for him. He frowned when Dobby simply opened the mail pouch and pulled out a couple pieces of folded parchment.

"They send and receive mail just with the pouch? I thought it was just an extra secure way for you to carry Gringotts mail."

"This way is being better than owl post and safer, too. No wizard can stops you from getting important mail this way. See, yous has goblin mail." Dobby toddled over and handed Harry the letter, then caught sight of the new roll of parchment bearing Hermione's name.

"Would yous like Dobby to deliver this to yous Granger when Dobby leaves for the evening?"

"That would be great. Looks like I'll be reading more Gringotts mail today. It's been a busy week for it." Harry laughed a little. "Okay, it's been a busy week for me. I'm not used to getting this much mail in a month, let alone a week."

"Yous will get used to it, Master Harry."

Pulling the little stand that he used as a nightstand over to him, Harry opened the first of his latest letters from Gringotts with no small amount of trepidation. Every time he opened one of these notes, he found out something else he'd been lied to about or read something he figured he could have done without knowing.

Mr. Harry James Potter,

Due to the information provided by you in your most recent correspondence, President Ragnok has ordered a full audit of the Potter Will and Estate. In conjunction with the audit of your accounts, we at Gringotts will also be auditing the accounts of your magical guardian, Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore.

The purpose of these audits is to ensure the security of your accounts and to bring to light any further misconduct on the part of your magical guardian that exceeds the denial to you of your mail and knowledge of your heritage and financial status.

It is also my duty as the Potter Estate Manager to inform you that Head Master Dumbledore's information and access rights in regards to your accounts have been suspended due to gross breach of conduct as a guardian. Because of the nature of the infractions and to protect your interests, Head Master Dumbledore will only be notified of the audit on his accounts unless you, as the wronged party, deem it appropriate to pursue further due process.

Please forward any questions or concerns you may have on this matter to my attention so that I may address them immediately.

Potter Estate Account Manager,

Griphook

Dumbfounded by the contents of the parchment in front of him, Harry sat and stared at the letter as if willing it to sink into his mind. Shaking himself after several minutes of silence, he read the letter again and began to smile.

He had honestly had no idea how much personal benefit he would gain from approaching the goblins for assistance, and even though he had only just begun to read about their culture, Harry had a much better comprehension of just how far the goblins would go to ensure the safety and security of his accounts.

The second letter was more of a note and the subject made his chest tight. He hadn't expected a response to his questions about the truth

of Sirius' death – he had simply needed to vent off the grief and frustration he was feeling at the time. Apparently Griphook had taken the questions in the serious bent that all goblins seemed to take on when discussing death or combat.

Mr. Potter,

Your concerns regarding your Godfather's will are perfectly understandable and I have in no way taken offence to your inquiry. This loss is difficult for you to accept, and is made more so through the lack of physical proof that you would have had under 'normal' circumstances.

All wills written at Gringotts are charmed with a connection to the life signature of the subject of said document. Until such time as the person dies, the will cannot be accessed by anyone other than the subject who requisitioned it. When the connection between the spirit and the physical body is broken, the will appears to the appropriate Account Manager for execution.

I offer my condolences yet again and hope that this information helps you in your time of grieving.

Potter Estate Account Manager,

Griphook

"So you're really gone, huh, Padfoot? Really gone..." Shaking his head as if to clear it, Harry scrubbed at his eyes, but he had no more tears to rub away. The confirmation that his Godfather was indeed gone was the closure, the confirmation, that he had been craving. Now he could stop looking out the window every time he heard a familiar sounding bark or a knock at the door. He could move on.

"Enough goblin stuff for one day," he mused. "Let's find something different for a change. If I look at any more school books in the next day or so, I think I'm going to Incendio them."

Eyeballing his old school trunk, he opened it and lifted his shrunken trunk out before fingering the wand he had chosen as his own.

"Might as well give it a shot," he mused into the air. "What's the worst they can do? Expel me? I'm thinking that might not be so bad..." Performing the appropriate wand movements, Harry quietly called out the incantation to enlarge the trunk. "Engorgio!"

The trunk returned to its original size so quickly that Harry wasn't sure what to think. That spell had always seemed to have an effect that was visible – you could watch the trunk get bigger. The amount of magic he had felt answering his quiet call had been many times more than what he was accustomed to as well. As a point in fact, he couldn't recall ever feeling his magic before acquiring this wand.

"That's some wand," he whispered and actually looked at the trunk. Grinning in his usual lopsided manner, he nodded appreciatively. Dobby had picked a trunk that very closely resembled a school trunk, even down to its scuffed exterior. He opened it to the first compartment and blinked. This wasn't a compartment. This was a small library complete with bookshelves. Shifting to drop in, he was startled by the appearance of a simple set of stairs.

"Brilliant"

Descending cautiously down the narrow stairs, he immediately focused on the curiosity inspiring crate that Dobby had filched from Borgin and Burkes. Forcing himself to ignore it for now, he went to the full bookshelves and looked through what he had available to study beyond his five years worth of school books. Until he received his O.W.L.s, he wouldn't know what to expect from the coming year. He pulled 'Occlumency: Fortress of the Mind' off the shelf and crossed the small room to lay it by the stairs.

Taking a deep breath, he then allowed his focus to return to that ever so tempting crate. Unsure if it was the fact that he knew it contained dark books and objects or if it was simply something he had been told time and again that he shouldn't have, he took a large measure of guilty pleasure in opening the crate back up and pulling its contents out for inspection.

“The seductive caress of twilight,” the teen whispered and then shivered at the overly appropriate tone of the statement. He had unloaded and shelved twenty large, very old looking tomes before he came to five that quite literally took his breath away.

Covered in what appeared to be a dark green hide of some sort, the large volumes were decorated with silver trim and locked with what appeared to be silver serpents. The large, calligraphy S on the front cover gave him the final hint prior to the disgruntled hissing that issued forth from the serpent lock.

//Unhand me or I will bite you, fool!// the indignant hissing paused.
//Oh, why bother...can't understand me anyway...//

//You're beautiful,// Harry hissed back. //if you truly want me to put you down, I will.//

//A Speaker! A polite one, too! It has been so long since I was able to speak to someone other than my brothers.// The silver snake studied Harry with an unnerving intensity before relenting. //Little Salazar...you look like my Master, except as he might have as a boy...you wish to read my Master's journals, yesss?//

//I would be honoured to have the chance to read them,// Harry agreed.

//Then I will key the journals to you. To do this I have to bite you.// The serpent struck without further ado, holding on only long enough to sample the young wizard's blood before hissing its satisfaction. All five journals glowed briefly before returning to their original state. The lock clicked open quietly on the journal that Harry held in his hands.

“Okayyy...” The simple act of being keyed in to the journals reminded Harry of just how utterly clueless he still was about the magical world. Beyond the concept of Constant Vigilance, he simply had no idea what was truly safe for him to do. He had a pretty good grasp on what was dangerous, but even that was limited. “Oh well, I guess that settles that. I am the proud owner of five of Salazar Slytherin's journals.”

Opening the journal to see what sort of information he might find, Harry frowned at the page full of squiggles that seemed to writhe for a moment before resolving themselves into something his mind understood as English.

//Parseltongue writing! Brilliant!//

Shaking himself out of his daze, he quickly shelved the journals and closed the crate. He didn't know how much longer he had before Mad-Eye arrived and he didn't dare allow himself to be seen emerging from the trunk. Grabbing his book, he climbed out, deposited his wand inside and closed it up. Muttering the shrinking charm, he replaced the new trunk inside his old one and glanced over at the time. The guard would change in a half hour, so he had time to relax before anyone like Mad-Eye was around to snoop on him. He relaxed visibly when a quick look around the room showed no letters from the Improper Use of Magic Office.

Dropping onto his bed to read for a while, Harry smiled to himself. This being able to do magic thing could really grow on me, he decided.

Coming on duty as the last sunlight faded from the sky, Alastor 'Mad-Eye' Moody did a thorough scan of the Dursley residence, his magical eye focusing on the Potter boy for a long moment before moving on once he saw that there was no wand on his person. He didn't care for Albus' idea of disarming the boy for the summer, but he didn't see much point in arguing. All he ever seemed to do was read and work on his homework, anyway.

A slightly malicious grin curved his lips and twisted his scarred face. Wandless or not, maybe he would test the boy out when he was in the garden, see if he was as quick as Shacklebolt had claimed. That would mean getting himself moved to the day shift, but it might just be worth it.

"If you're going to be getting away from Aurors, then you'll be doing it right," he whispered. "No more getting caught once I'm done with your skinny self, humph."

Translations:

Oc Dager-Goblin for Young Warrior

Sheklac-Goblin for Chieftain

Acclaro obliviosus iugum obligatio oppressos - Reveal obliviation,
bindings, bonds and oppression of will

“He who fights with monsters might take care lest he thereby become a monster. And if you gaze for long into an abyss, the abyss gazes also into you.”

Friedrich Nietzsche

July 9th, #4 Privet Drive

“Clear your mind,” Harry breathed, the irony of his own words not lost on him in regards to this exercise. Practicing meditation as directed by his book on Occlumency, he relaxed and visualized his rudimentary shields before starting the process of building them up layer by layer.

Dobby watched his master focus more and more on the defences of his mind and kept his own senses open for the arrival of other wizards who might disturb the young man.

Drawn deep into a trance when he accessed his magical core and the room that represented it in his mind, Harry winced at how cluttered and downright messy his thinking was. No wonder I have trouble remembering things half the time. If this was a real room, I wouldn't be sure where to look first... After a few more minutes of aimless wandering and shuffling about, he sighed his exasperation with himself and forced his thoughts back on track.

How to do this, he mused, and recalled from the book that the more uniquely personal the concept for his construct was, the more defensible his mind would be. Grinning wickedly, he began the laborious process of organizing his thoughts and memories into categories using a filing and labelling system comprehensible only to himself, Tom and perhaps a few other rare individuals in the world. Everything was labelled using parseltongue; nothing would retain an English designation, including the memories themselves if he had his way about it.

Seeing the sweat break out on his young master's brow, Dobby moved forward and conjured a cloth to dry the dampness away.

Alerted to his flagging energy levels by Dobby's gentle touch, Harry opened weary green eyes and smiled crookedly.

"That's hard work, Dobby. I had no idea how much effort went into serious Occlumency."

"Is you being okay, Master Harry?"

"Yeah, I'm just tired." The young wizard sighed and stretched until his back popped loudly in the quiet room.

"I have a question, Dobby."

"Yes, Master Harry?"

"I'm only curious, okay, but this is something I've been wondering about. Why do you call me Master when you don't have to? I'd rather you just called me Harry."

"Dobby knew yous would be asking about that eventually," the little elf whispered, eyes sad and full of the anticipation of punishment. "Around other wizards who is not needing to be knowing, Dobby is not calling you Master because it would be giving up Master's secrets. Dobby is most settled calling yous Master, Harry Potter, sir. Is being...unsettling not to."

"Oh...well, then we'll leave well enough alone, I guess," Harry mused aloud. He hadn't realized it might make Dobby uncomfortable to call him by his first name alone. "I'm used to it and I wouldn't want you to be uncomfortable. Thank you for explaining." He smiled at the eccentric little elf.

"Oh, the Great Harry Potter is the kindest master!" The elf hugged Harry around the waist and then bounced away. "Yous is hungry. Dobby will return."

Shaking his head over the elf's antics, Harry considered what to study now. He wanted to continue with the Goblin books, but hadn't confirmed if they were safe.

“No time like the present,” he stated and penned a quick note to Griphook. Rereading it to make sure it covered everything, he folded it closed and addressed it to his account manager. Placing it in the mail pouch, he looked over at his desk and blanched when he saw Hedwig’s empty cage.

I’ve barely paid her any mind over this last week...I owe her some serious time, he thought to himself and relaxed when he recalled that he had spent some time with her the last time she returned from a night of hunting. It wasn’t like he had a lot of mail for her to deliver. One quick note to the Order every three days was barely enough of a task to be called exercise for the snowy owl.

“It’ll get better soon,” he whispered into the air. “It has to.”

July 9th, Gringotts

Griphook pulled the latest letter from the Potter Heir out of his In Box and wondered what fresh bit of chaos it would unleash. He opened it with a true sense of anticipation.

Mister Griphook,

The books you sent me are very interesting and informative. I have finished the first one and have a question regarding something I discovered on the cover.

The goblin licked his thin lips and read on. There were only a few things the young wizard could be referring to, and he hoped his thoughts on the matter were correct.

Below the author’s name was a line of Latin that I didn’t realize was a spell until I was compelled to finish reading it. Were you aware of this unexpected feature? If so, I would really appreciate knowing what it did to me and what more I might expect from the rest of the books before I read on through the others.

Intrigued but wary,

Harry James Potter

Griphook sagged in his seat for a long moment, and then began to grin his delight as he reread the short note and let the words sink in. He sent a quick note to Ragnok letting him know what had transpired along with a promise to update him as soon as he knew more and then replied to Harry's query.

Mr. Harry James Potter,

Please allow me to offer my sincerest apologies. I did not mention the spells because they can only be viewed by a blood descendent of the late Lord Evans and the information we had available on your heritage did not indicate a connection between yourself and the wizarding Evans line. Congratulations on locating a confirmed relation. I will update our records to show this new aspect of your lineage and your late mother's, as well.

According to the information I have received about the series of books that were written by Lord Evans, the spell on the first volume is to increase your reading speed to match that of your current retention level; as your ability to retain knowledge increases, so too will your reading speed. The second spell is designed to enhance your retention, the third to enhance comprehension, the fourth to enhance your ability to recall information and the fifth is designed to enhance your mental focus.

The sixth book is a bit more than the other five. If you are just a blood descendent of Lord Evans, that volume will have no special spells or information beyond the goblin magic it can teach you. If you are, by chance, the Heir to Lord Evans' title, there should be a letter at the beginning of the book. As there has yet to be an acknowledged Heir to the Evans line, I do not know what information the letter might contain.

If, after reading through the series of books in their proper order, you do discover the letter, please notify me as soon as reasonably possible. I can then arrange for any additional will readings that may apply to your situation. Please feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns you may have.

Potter Estate Account Manager,

Griphook

Amazed yet again by everything that seemed to happen to the Chosen, he sent the letter off to Harry's mail pouch and settled in to complete his work for the day and to contemplate what interesting news Harry's next letter would bring.

If most wizards found the sight of a happily grinning Goblin to be a frightful sight, then the unmitigated glee on Chieftain Ragnok's face would have inspired nothing short of pure terror. He read Griphook's latest news again and chuckled wickedly.

"Finally, we have a descendent of Lord Evans. It has been far too long."

Putting the note aside for safe keeping, Ragnok picked up his quill and wrote a short reply to the young Potter Estate manager.

Oc Dager Griphook,

As is the norm of late, you are the bearer of interesting news. Keep up the good work. In regards to the Evans' issue, compile all information that we have readily available on the Potter and Evans inheritances. Be prepared to present this information to the Chosen when he arrives for his private will readings.

Sheklac Ragnok

July 9th, The Burrow

Sitting outside, back to her favourite oak tree and her head on Hermione's shoulder, Ginny smiled tremulously. They were all gathered together again to talk about the events of the last four or five years and, in the bright light of day, it seemed so very surreal to think of what she – and they – had been through.

"Lucius Malfoy is the one who slipped Tom's diary into my school books, you know."

“Oh, no! How did he manage to do that with every one around?” Hermione asked; she hugged Ginny reassuringly, her eyes widening as she considered the possibilities. “Why would he have had something of Voldemort’s that was as personal as something like that had to have been anyway?”

“He slipped it inside one of my books, transfiguration I think. I didn’t even notice it until we got home, and I’d always wanted to have a journal...so I kept it and started to write in it at school...”

“He dropped it in your stuff around the time that he picked that fight with Dad, I bet,” Ron commented. “I can still see the look on that big prat’s face in my head, that moment right around the time Dad punched the bloody Death Eater right on the nose...I was so proud of him for that.”

Ginny nodded silent agreement and continued on with her retelling – if she could just get it out, maybe it wouldn’t feel so heavy and dark inside of her.

“My first year started off hard, anyway. I mean, c’mon...I was the youngest and I felt so alone. The crush I had on Harry sure didn’t help matters any, especially since he was too clueless to even notice me at the time.” She sighed expressively. “So, I started to talk to Tom more and more and he always sounded so understanding and sweet...he was always so charming when he talked to me.” Ginny blushed lightly.

“He listened to everything I had to say, no matter how silly, and I had never had someone do that for me before...I thought it was so romantic and so I poured more and more of myself into writing to him and then the bad things started to happen...”

“The roosters, the petrified students, the messages on the walls,” Hermione whispered. “You must have been scared half to death; having him inside your mind like that...did you know...were you aware of what was happening when he was making you do things?”

"Sometimes I could see everything, sometimes I thought I was sleep walking. I'd get ready for bed and pick up the diary to write, then I'd wake up and be outside behind Hagrid's hut with blood on my hands or down in Moaning Myrtle's bathroom," Ginny murmured. "Towards the end, I saw more and more and I tried to tell someone but he wouldn't let me. By the time Harry woke me in the Chamber, I...I almost didn't care if I lived or died anymore...Tom made me do such awful things..."

Her body shook as the tears made their way out and carried her pain, her fear and her frustration out with them. Sucking in great gulps of air, a wounded sound accompanied every wracking sob until she was simply too exhausted to cry any more. Slowly becoming aware of the hands rubbing soothing circles on her back and of the sniffing of the others around her, she opened her eyes and tried to smile for them.

"We're here for you, Ginny," Neville assured the distraught girl, his face tracked with tears of his own. "You're not alone, no matter how much you may feel that way some times. We're going to stick together...that's how we've made it this far."

"Thanks, Nev...all of you..." Ginny sat back up and scrubbed at her face before returning to her original position with her head on Hermione's shoulder. "So, what were you guys supposed to not talk about?"

"The troll in the girl's bathroom, the Philosopher's Stone, the Chamber of Secrets, Norbert, Buckbeak," Ron rattled off with a wry grin. "We've gotten into and out of so much trouble and we've done so many things together, it's no wonder we're such good friends."

"Hermione hit me with Petrificus totalus to keep me from trying to stop them from going after the Stone," Neville related with a light blush. "I think that was the first brave thing I ever did...um, anyway, the other thing was Harry's Patronus. I don't know why that would be something to keep quiet about, but there you go."

"That sure was some Patronus, though," Ron agreed with a gleeful grin and thought back to the Quidditch match where Harry used it against Malfoy and his goons when they were dressed as Dementors.

"It was brilliant! I think Malfoy pissed himself when he saw that bloody big Stag come charging down at him."

"You have no idea," Hermione muttered, then flushed when all eyes focused on her with intense curiosity.

"Um, Ron was in the Hospital Wing for that part of our adventures in third year. Harry and I used my time turner to go back a few hours so we could try and rescue Buckbeak and Sirius. I was there watching when the Dementors came after the earlier us on the other side of the lake." Pausing to force herself to breathe slowly so she didn't hyperventilate, the bushy haired witch let out a choked sound born of remembered fear and helplessness.

"It...it was so bitterly cold and all I know is I was standing with Harry one second and the next I was on the ground too scared and weak to move...Harry just charged forward to the edge of the water like he wasn't bothered by the cold or fear and sent his Patronus out across the lake into the swarm. I've never...there were so many Dementors I couldn't count them all and he drove them all away with one spell..." She shivered at the memory of cold numbness and a weakness she hoped to never feel again. "It was terrible and beautiful all at the same time...and I felt so useless and helpless and small..."

Neville squeaked as he tried to imagine what Hermione was describing, his eyes going wide as he goggled at her. He barely registered the hand that was now rubbing his back as he sat forward to squeeze the distraught girl's hand. She was the least useless, helpless person he knew and it was disturbing to think of her reduced to that state of fear.

"You're not useless or helpless or any of that other rubbish, Hermione...you're the least useless person I know."

"Thanks, Neville..."

Luna smiled dreamily and kept up her soothing action as her hand rubbed circles on Neville's back..

“A corporeal patronus requires a truly joyful memory, one full of Light. Imagine what he must have been thinking of at the time.”

“I’ll have to ask him sometime,” Hermione stated once she’d recovered some of her wavering composure. “It seems like most of us were made to keep quiet about the same things. That just bugs me even more. I mean, most of what we were made to keep quiet about doesn’t seem to be that terribly important. Some of it was, of course, but...”

“Well, strategically, it makes the most sense of anything we’ve encountered so far,” Ron muttered, brown eyes focused internally while he thought it out. “We, as a group, knew the largest portion of the facts about quite a few very sensitive events, so if whoever didn’t want the stories to get out was to shut us up, the stories would die. Rumours starve to death without constant feeding. I don’t get why they didn’t just Oblivate us, though. Then this wouldn’t have happened.”

“Maybe who ever did this to us was thinking ahead in case there was a future use for the memories,” Luna offered. “It’s also possible that the memories were too intricate to Oblivate. Maybe they would have had to erase more than could be explained away to cover up something as complex as your experiences going after the Stone or what Hermione saw while in the past. There is a limit to what that spell is capable of doing, or at least it seems so from what I have seen in Hermione’s notes.”

Hermione just nodded her agreement on that point and frowned as something else that had been said rose up again now that she’d had time to process the conversation so far.

“There is that,” she agreed. “Whoever did this to us would have been hurt in some way if the public gained knowledge of the events that have been going on at Hogwarts and the danger that the students have been in on a regular basis.” Hermione focused on Ginny and tilted her head to one side, her expression full of curiosity and more than a little concern.

“Ginny? Did something happen between you and Harry? You stopped acting so cute and funny around Harry after your first year and with everything that happened, I would’ve expected your crush to get worse, at least for a little while... He should have been even more important to you, what with him being your ‘Knight in Shining Armour’ and all...”

“I know you can calm him down when none of us can get through to him, and you definitely seem to understand him better than anyone else does,” Luna mused quietly. “Do you still have a crush on him?”

“Hey, now! That’s personal.” Ron protested and squeezed Ginny’s foot gently to let her know he was there to support her.

“It’s okay, Ron. We’re all friends.” Ginny smiled a little more strongly, then remembered the question and shivered a little. “Of course I understand him better than the rest of you. I don’t think I understand Tom as he is now quite the way Harry does...I’m certainly not constantly badgered by him the way I get the feeling Harry is...but we’ve both shared Tom’s thoughts, we’ve both been touched by Him, and no, Merlin no, I definitely do not have a crush on Harry any more.”

“Do you mind if I ask why?” Hugging the younger girl, Hermione ventured her question cautiously.

“Tom,” Ginny whispered and tears slipped down her face again, but this time she didn’t break down completely. Drawing in a ragged breath, she rubbed her cheek against the older Witch’s shoulder and answered quietly.

“The resemblance between them is...it’s frightening. Tom was taller at 16 than Harry was the last time I saw him, but otherwise, they could have been mistaken for brothers, they look that similar.” She licked her lips delicately. “When I look into Harry’s eyes, Tom is right there looking back at me. I don’t want to see it, but even when I couldn’t seem to remember what had happened, something held me back from him. It’s something real, a distance that I can always feel between us.”

“Do you think Harry is like Vol...Vold...You Know Who?” Neville stammered out. “Harry wouldn’t hurt people like that.”

“Yeah, no way would he lose it like that,” Ron stated firmly.

Ginny giggled madly for several long moments, brown eyes full of amusement, fear and regret.

“Someone will take the Dark Lord’s place eventually. That’s how it works, guys. Pay more attention in History of Magic and you’ll see what I mean. Light and Dark are always opposing...” She started to giggle again and then lapsed back into tears as Hermione rocked her and crooned gently. Her reactions were earning her some very concerned looks, and she was oblivious to it all.

“Voldemort’s bond left its mark on your mind as only something truly evil can do.” Luna scooted closer to add her soothing touch to Hermione’s. “You see the darkness more clearly than we do, Ginny. It is okay to see It. It spent almost a year looking into you, so you’re bound to look back after a while. Just remember that you’re not the only one who has lived through these things. The ones who love you are out here with you now, in the Light.”

“It’s so beautiful though, y’know?” Ginny relaxed bit by bit. “It’s not so harsh and full of sharp edges the way the light is.”

“Stay with us. We don’t want to lose you, Gin-Gin.” Ron captured his sister’s hand and squeezed to get her to look at him. “We don’t want you to get lost in it. You’re the only sister I have...”

“You’re so sweet, Ronniekins. Don’t worry. I’m not going to float away.” Ginny sighed again and sat up, hands scrubbing at her face yet again.

“Gin...please don’t take this the wrong way,” Ron began, and hugged Ginny tightly before drawing back to meet her gaze. He wasn’t sure where the words were coming from, but it felt like something that needed to be said, so he opened his mouth and let it tumble out. “But ...I doubt that Bellatrix Lestrange started out her first couple years at

Hogwarts planning to be the most feared witch alive. I love you way too much to lose you like that, Sis.”

Shocked that Ron of all people would say something like that to her, Ginny just stared at her brother with her mouth open and fresh tears welling in her eyes. His words stung as sharply as if he had slapped her on the face and they served to focus her attention on what was happening inside of her own mind more than any of the sympathy had managed to do so far. She nodded jerkily and burrowed into the safety of his embrace.

“I love you too, Ron...no matter what, please don’t let me be like her...”

July 9th, #4 Privet Drive

Opening up his school trunk and pulling the new one out, Harry muttered ‘Engorgio’ under his breath. He’d figured out quite by accident that the trunk was magically triggered to shrink and enlarge on its own with the use of programmed words, a fact that he could appreciate a lot more now that he spent so much time wandless.

Descending into his library once he’d opened it, Harry pulled the second Goblin book off the shelf and grabbed an old spell book to take up along with it. That way he could swap back and forth between the two without the risk of exposing his new trunk during an unneeded trip to the Library.

Spying the crate he’d been forced to abandon the last time Mad-Eye had come on duty, Harry set his books on the stairs and crossed the small room to investigate anything that might remain in the crate. If he was thinking correctly, there had been a few items still left in the bottom.

Looking in, he arched an eyebrow inquisitively, and then cursed Mundungus Fletcher in whatever languages he could think of at the time.

“Bloody thief!” he growled and eyed the glass bottle that appeared to be stoppered with a carved opal. He recognized that particular item

from Grimmauld Place and, though he was curious about the red liquid it contained, he wasn't curious enough to open it. "I knew you were stealing from Sirius!"

Moving the glass bottle to the bookshelf that contained the darkest of his books, Harry then reached in and drew out a locket that hung from a simple but solid chain. He caught his breath when he really looked at it. It was one of the things he'd seen when he was helping with the cleaning at Grimmauld Place and he hadn't recognized it at the time, but after seeing Slytherin's journals, he knew exactly what it was that he held.

"Slytherin's locket," he whispered reverently. That joined the bottle on its shelf and he returned to inspect the last remaining pair of items. "Knives?" he wondered aloud and cautiously touched one of the sheaths. When nothing happened, he picked them up and admired the beautiful but functional looking set of blades. Placing them on the shelf below the locket, he smiled to himself. Maybe I'll find someone who can teach me to use them...

A slight pulse of magic drew Harry's attention away from his contemplation of the knives that lay on the shelf before him. Retrieving the books he'd chosen, he climbed out of the trunk and closed everything back up. Laying the books on his bed, he checked to see if the magic had come from the mail pouch. He vaguely recalled feeling a similar pulse when he placed a letter inside, so his curiosity was peaked. Opening the pouch, he found the reply from Griphook.

"That was fast." Reading through the letter, he began to grin, his eyes brightening with excitement. "Enhancements like that I can definitely deal with. Brilliant!" He shook his head over the congratulatory comment from Griphook. All it did was add to the hundreds of questions he already had, though he did have to admit that part of his excitement came from discovering part of his history.

Settling on his bed, he dropped the other spell book on the bed beside him and dragged the second Goblin book into his lap.

July 10th, St. Mungo's, Office of Master Mind Healer Octavius Monroe

"Hello, ladies and gentlemen. I hope yesterday wasn't too rough on you emotionally," Healer Monroe commented as the Ministry crew filtered in and took their seats. "Breaking the kind of emotional blocks that we encountered can be very stressful in the days and weeks immediately following the treatment."

"We all talked quite a lot, yesterday," Hermione replied. "It was hard to deal with some of what we remembered, but it felt good all the same. The biggest thing, the most painful, is the sense of betrayal...someone we trusted did this to us..." She sniffled a little, eyes made shiny by unshed tears.

"We cried a lot yesterday, or at least I did, anyway. I expected to though. They cried with me for part of it, but most of the time I think they were crying for me..." Ginny frowned and shook her head. "The strangest thing was the last two nights. I didn't have any bad dreams about dark places and being cold...about dying. Now that I have the memories back the way they're supposed to be, I don't feel afraid the same way I did just a few days ago. It used to be all I could do to go into the dungeons without jumping at shadows. Does that make any sense at all?" Tears welled up and she swiped at them reflexively. "I'm tired of crying about this!"

"You have a full years worth of frustration and fear to vent out and the coping process itself is several years overdue, so yes, it makes perfect sense," Octavius murmured soothingly. "The urge, the need, to cry will lessen with time and support, a thing you all have an abundance of. Your friendship has survived these traumas. Now, it will help you heal from them."

"Thank Merlin for that," Ginny whispered. "How do you normally help people through events like this?"

"I use a modified form of Occlumency that allows me to share the memory with you much like it would be if we used a Pensive, except that I can also see it through your experience. That way I can better

help you deal with what has happened and move on without denying the existence of the trauma.”

“That which doesn’t kill us only makes us stronger, right, Doc?” Hermione grinned a little. “That sounds like an interesting way to approach therapy. It must cut down on recovery time.”

“Amazingly so,” Octavius agreed. “We can also quickly eliminate spell related problems and back lash symptoms. The benefits are too numerous to name.”

“Well, let’s get started then,” Luna declared. “Who’s first?”

Ginny laughed genuinely at her friend’s antics.

“You, since you’re in such a hurry.”

Luna just grinned back at Ginny and shrugged.

“That’s fine with me. What do I need to do, Healer Monroe?”

“Just relax. We’re going to focus on the events that led you to the ministry and on through the fight there in the Department of Mysteries...”

Luna gasped softly when Healer Monroe appeared beside her in her memory of the group’s arrival to the atrium at the Ministry.

“Just so you know this isn’t where everything began, Healer Monroe. It began at Hogwarts. Unfortunately, the details of what truly led us here are known only to Harry. All I know is he was led to believe his Godfather was being held prisoner in the Hall of Prophecy by Voldemort.”

Octavius nodded his understanding. He had been fairly certain that there had to be critical events leading up to what had happened at the Ministry, but Ron had been incredibly reticent about discussing it, and he hadn’t yet developed enough of a rapport with the young man to feel comfortable about pushing the issue.

“Thank you, Miss Lovegood. I appreciate the information. Do you wish to go further back and review those memories as well?”

“No, I don’t need to. I enjoyed riding the Thestral and I wasn’t the one who had a rough time of it at Hogwarts. Ron, Hermione, and Ginny might need to discuss it more than I.” Luna smiled. “Shall we? The Department of Mysteries was really quite fascinating...”

Healer Monroe backed out of the young woman’s mind once he’d seen her point of view on the events that had led to their group being in his office. She was remarkably unfazed by the combat and everything else that had gone on around her, a fact that made him shake his head in quiet amazement.

“Well, Miss Lovegood, how are you feeling?”

“I feel great, Healer Monroe. It was really quite nice to be able to show someone what happened. Talking about it is okay, but it lacks the complete expression of actually sharing a memory. Thank you.”

“You’re quite welcome, my dear.” Octavius smiled and looked to the other four. “Anyone else up to taking a look through now? Once I finish with whoever is next, we’ll break for lunch, my treat. When we get back, we can work with the rest of you. How does that sound?”

Mind reeling from everything he had learned that day, Octavius watched five young people leave his office with a great deal more youthful exuberance to their steps than they had come in with. He shook his head. This session had only touched on the events specifically related to the fight at the Department of Mysteries and he was left feeling slightly in awe of the cohesive teamwork and loyalty that bound these young men and women together. He, personally, was exhausted and emotionally wrung out from walking them through their various personal battles.

It’s kind of a pity that none of them got to see Potter duelling Lestranger, he mused. Ah well, perhaps it’s just as well that they didn’t. They were in enough danger without being exposed to her. I have enough work to do getting them back on a level keel as it is.

Gathering his things, he made his way to the fireplace and floored to the Ministry. He had several files to update thanks to today's fruitful session.

July 10th, Unplottable Location

Voldemort studied his followers as they arrived one by one and considered which ones to elevate to leadership positions for the attacks he had planned. So far, at least these existing elite had managed to not fall to a handful of school children. He smirked maliciously. The very thought of how twelve of his Inner Circle had fallen to his little serpent and followers inspired in him a deep need to prove his rival incapable of standing against him.

"My loyal followerssss," he murmured sibilantly. "In the next few weeks we will be preparing for our assault on Azkaban prison. It is time to bring your brothers back to the fold. I'm sure they have learned their lesson for failing me by now." His gaze moved from one Death Eater to the next as he measured their ability and decided their fate. "Prepare yourselves. Hone your skills. There will be Aurors to dispatch and I will be calling the last of the Dementors into my service."

Aware of his need to swell his ranks and of the rather vexing fact that doing so would require the use of his Inner Circle to train and prepare the newest recruits, Tom mused on what to offer the wraiths when he stepped forward to call the full force of the Dementor ranks to his Battle Standard.

"Once the Auror threat has been eliminated, I will call the Dementors and have the entirety of the prison released and brought to stand before me. Those too weak to be of use and those who refuse to join me will be food for the Dementors and the worms. All others will be marked and trained for the coming raids and battles."

Studying each Death Eater again, his red eyes noted which ones continued to stand still, silent and resolute under his penetrating stare and which ones gave away their weakness by squirming and shifting where they stood.

“Step up your recruiting of like minded wizards and witches and remember to capture any muggle borns you can during raids. They will be most useful during the initiations and the revel that will follow our triumphant return from Azkaban! Now leave me! I have much to plan. Bellatrix, Wormtail. Remain.”

The room emptied far more rapidly than it had filled and he snorted quietly over such a blatant sign of their fear. He watched Bellatrix and Wormtail; their reverent bows make him smile a little, though it still looked like a smirk on his thin lipped mouth.

Ever eager to serve her master, and even more eager to make up for her loss of face at the Ministry, Bellatrix raised her face to gaze at Voldemort with madly glittering eyes.

“How may I serve you, My Lord?”

“I want to know every rumour and scrap of information you two can find out about the number of Aurors in place at Azkaban, their shift change schedule, and any other defences that may have been put in place. Find out if there will be any prisoner transfers before the end of the month. This attack will happen in two weeks or less barring any significant transfers that may make it prudent to hold our strike. Report back to me in one week unless you find significant information. I need not remind you of the penalties for failure.”

“It will be as you command, My Lord,” Bellatrix declared and bowed again before Apparating away.

“Y-yes, my Lord,” Wormtail stuttered out, his eyes nearly as mad as Bellatrix’s. He apparated away with a ‘crack’, leaving Voldemort to contemplate his next moves in solitude.

Retiring to his private study, Voldemort settled in his chair and propped his booted feet up on the desk as was his habit of late. He knew that the offering of any too infirm to join his ranks and of those who refused him would serve as a valid token to the Dementors, but it would in no way be enough to sway them to his side. To pull them away from their easy feeding grounds he would have to offer something far more valuable than what they already had.

So I promise them something that will cause me no pain and will instead sow fear and chaos amongst the rest of those weak minded fools who oppose me, he mused. The promise of free feeding rights on any witch, wizard or muggle they can catch except those that I have marked as my own should present them with the needed incentive to abandon the stale offerings of Azkaban. Those few that are mine and Harry Potter will be left untouched. My little serpent is just that...he is mine to deal with as I see fit.

He chuckled to himself, the sound chilling in its malicious tone. When I am done, Azkaban will stand empty and wizarding Britain will tremble in fear at the very thought of what I will do next.

July 11th, #4 Privet Drive

Awakening with the sun as he seemed to be inclined to do lately, Harry decided to change up his reading for a few hours. He was intrigued by what might lay waiting in Salazar's journals and settled in to read once he had retrieved the first one.

Fascinated by the insights into the personality of Salazar and the snapshots of his interactions with the three other founders of Hogwarts, Harry shook his head in quiet amazement. How could anyone think this man was evil? He wondered. It's obvious that he was more than willing to learn whatever magic came his way, but he sounds like a very careful and cautious person...Godric sounds more like the type to go out and get into trouble. Harry laughed when he considered the House he had been placed in. The Hat would have placed him in Salazar's house, but his own rash tendencies had blinded to anything except his prejudices against Slytherin. It really would have been nice to know Salazar...any of them, really...he seemed to truly admire Helga and Rowena and the way he interacted with Godric sounds a lot like me and Ron...

He encountered his first section of spells after about an hour of reading. Eyes wide, he read and re-read the notes for the spells that Slytherin had been crafting on his own. Some of the spells were very advanced healing magic, but Harry could already think of several uses for them in combat. Then he reached Salazar's notes on the

subject and blanched. Apparently my thoughts weren't very original after all...at least I know I can use the healing spells for harm...just forget to limit the affects...ouch.

The young wizard shuddered and closed the journal after placing a scrap of parchment inside to mark his place. He'd had enough of that for now. Laying the large book beside him, he stretched and glanced at the clock.

"Nine? There's no way I was reading for three hours..." His surprised reverie was broken by the unwelcome sound of his uncle bellowing his name. He groaned, then got up and trotted down the stairs and into the kitchen. "What do you want, Vernon?"

"Boy! It's about time you showed your face around here! Get this kitchen clean, then I have a list of chores waiting for you and I expect them to all be done today if you plan on eating," Vernon declared pompously, his chest puffed up in what he thought was an imposing manner.

"I see it didn't take you very long to forget my friend's warning." Harry glared at Vernon and didn't back down when the large man's face started to go purple. "I won't be doing any of the chores you assign, Vernon. I will tend the flower beds and the yard because I enjoy doing so and I need to get outside a little bit every day. Get Dudley to do the rest of the work. It might actually do him some good."

"You ungrateful little freak...!" Vernon raised one beefy fist and made as if to move towards Harry.

"Now, Vernon," Harry murmured, wand out and pointed unwaveringly at his Uncle's chest. "Have you forgotten what they told you about my presence here being for your safety as much as it is for mine? How about the part where if I leave, the big bad Dark Lord will come after you to get at me? The wards will fall if I don't consider this place of yours home and then He will come for you." He smiled coldly. "Here's the best one yet, though. Do you remember the part where they warned you that it's dangerous to push me?"

"You can't do magic over the summer. They'll expel you from that freak school of yours, and then where will you be? You'll be no where with nothing just like your lazy slut of a mother and that lay about, good for nothing freak she called a husband!" Vernon declared his opinion in a tone of malicious triumph. "So put your silly stick away and do as you're told, Boy!"

"Do not call me Boy and don't you ever speak about my parents again, you worthless excuse for a muggle," Harry growled, eyes bright with anger and power. He was so angry he shook with it and the urge, the desire to do harm was so thick in his chest he swore he would choke on it if he didn't do something, anything...The dishes in the sink shattered, making Petunia scream through her raised hands and startling Vernon into yelling out in fear. Startled by the noise as much as the sudden accidental magic, Harry's thoughts cleared enough for him to repair the dishes and cast the spell that would make the dishes clean and put themselves away.

"There," he sneered. "The kitchen is clean and there will be no owls telling me I've been expelled. Do you understand me, Vernon?"

Watching with open horror as the dishes washed, dried and put themselves away; Petunia sagged in her seat, face pale.

"No...they said you weren't allowed..." Her voice quavered even more when she met Harry's fierce gaze.

"They were wrong. Have a good day, 'family'."

Harry stormed out of the kitchen and into the back yard, his magic still lashing around inside of him as if trying to force its way out. Standing in the middle of the expanse of perfect green grass, he forced himself to breathe in and out like he did when he was trying to work on his Occlumency.

Latching onto that concept, he focused even further and felt his magic finally begin to settle down. Shaking himself forcefully to rid himself of the tingling sensation of violence that still lay over his skin like a fine sheen of sweat, he went into the shed and retrieved the tools and water hose he would need to work in the front yard.

Tonks watched Harry stalk into the front yard with an armload of tools and hose. Curious what he was going to do with everything, she cautiously moved closer so she could observe without giving herself away.

Satisfied with the placement of the hose he had just finished attaching to the water spigot, Harry stripped off his shirt and dropped down beside the first flower bed. Pulling weeds and loosening soil around the various flowers and shrubs, he gave himself up to the rhythm of his familiar and comforting movements. Continuing to work on his Occlumency while he worked, he soon felt a pleasant calm that brought a smile to his face. Maybe this is how it's supposed to feel when you work on it all of the time like they told me I needed to do. I just wish they'd told me how to do this and why it was so bloody important!

His calm faded during his contemplation of his supposed Occlumency lessons, so he forcefully redirected his attention outside of himself to get his mind off of it. He liked feeling calm and relatively happy and he wasn't going to let anything ruin what he was feeling right now. A soft humming reached his ears and he paused in what he was doing, his ears straining until he recognized the gentle sound as a female voice. Returning to his weeding, he began tossing weeds and dirt filled root clumps in the direction of the sound. He heard a slight impact first, and then a soft, feminine sounding voice cursed.

"Sorry about that. Didn't see you there," he quipped teasingly and continued to weed the bed and toss the refuse at his minder. More whispered curses followed until he was grinning and on the verge of full out laughter. "Why don't you just give in and talk to me? If you do, I'll stop pitching weeds and dirt at you."

Tonks groaned to herself and laughed a little. She had to admit to being curious how he had known she was there. Giving in, she greeted him properly.

"Wotcher, Harry. Can you stop bombarding me now? I promise I'll stick around and talk for a little while."

“Hi, Tonks. How long are you on duty?”

“Just a little while longer, then I have to go to work. At least it looks like they’ve been feeding you this summer. Are the muggles treating you better than they usually do?” Tonks took the opportunity to observe the young man when he rose and moved to another flower bed. Surprised at how much muscle he carried on his light frame for someone who had always appeared to be pathetically skinny, she blurted out a comment before she could stop it. Blushing heatedly, hands over her mouth, she had never been more grateful for an invisibility cloak than she was at that very moment.

“Bloody hell, Harry, you look great! What’d you do to get a body like that?”

Startled into a blush of his own, Harry looked down at himself, then over where he’d last heard Tonks squeak in mortified embarrassment. The compliment impacted then and he grinned crookedly.

“Quidditch,” he replied matter of factly. “That helps a lot and doing yard work like this all summer doesn’t hurt. Why? You sound like you saw something you liked, Tonks.” He couldn’t stop the grin. People talked to each other like this all of the time in the common room and, all of a sudden, he understood the banter for the teasing and flirting that it was.

“Oh, hush, you,” Tonks grumbled, but her tone didn’t carry much bite. He did look good and she had seen something she liked, so maybe she could turn the tables on him. She certainly hadn’t expected him to flirt with her. “What’s not to like? I have a front row seat to the most eligible hottie in the wizarding world and he’s showing off his half naked body for me.” He blushed bright red and she pumped a mental fist in the air.

“Uh, sure, Tonks. You’re just saying that to tease me. I’m just a skinny teenager.” Harry shook his head at the clumsy Auror and considered whether he could trust her with what he needed to ask. He had too many questions to go on just asking the Goblins. They didn’t know everything that people like Tonks or Remus might know about his parents and his situation. He decided it was at least worth a

try. "Can I ask you something serious, Tonks? Serious as in never tell anyone we talked about it?"

"What's wrong, Harry? Is it the muggles?" Tonks went on alert instantly. His mood shift had been so sudden that she almost hadn't been able to follow it on his face.

"Swear that what I ask you won't go any further than you and I..."

"You're deadly serious..." Tonks took a deep breath and let it out while she considered what to do. If she said yes, and gave her oath, it would be binding. If she said no, he'd probably never trust her again. "Look, do me one favour and let me ask you something before I give you my oath, okay?"

"That depends on what it is, but you can go ahead and ask."

Tonks opened her invisibility cloak just enough so that Harry could see her face.

"Is keeping this from everyone going to get me in trouble with work or the Order?"

Meeting the Metamorphmagus' currently lavender gaze, Harry studied her intently before answering her inquiry.

"It won't get you in trouble at work. As a matter of fact, you may be glad you know if things go badly. On the other hand, it might get you in trouble with a few people in the Order if they found out we talked about these things, but they'd have to find out first."

Letting out a breath she hadn't been aware she was holding, Tonks nodded and licked her lips.

"Alright then, Harry. I, Nymphadora Tonks, do swear on my magic that I will share nothing of what is spoken between myself and Harry James Potter with anyone living or dead until he gives me permission to do so." A soft flare of magic surrounded the pair and then faded from view after a moment.

"Thank you," Harry whispered. "I'm sorry I had to ask you to do that, but..."

"I'm okay with it, Harry. Now, what's bothering you so badly that you can't go to Dumbledore about it?" Tonks fell back on her butt in shock when the younger wizard's eyes flared with power and anger after the mention of Dumbledore's name. "What did he do to you for you to be that angry...?"

"He has lied to me since I can remember and he kept me from knowing anything about my family. He has let me get into more dangerous situations than anyone my age should have ever seen and he has done nothing to prepare me for what I have to do," Harry growled out. "The Dursleys starved me and kept me locked in the cupboard under the stairs for the first eleven years of my life. Did you know that? Dumbledore did. My Hogwarts letter was addressed to me in my bloody cupboard."

Horried, Tonks sat there and stared at the angry young man for several minutes before her brain kicked back into gear and began making sense of what he had said.

"But...how could he let that happen? He..."

"He did the same and worse to Sirius, y'know. Sirius was innocent and Dumbledore never fought for him to have a trial. Sirius told me a lot of things like the fact that Dumbledore knew that Peter Pettigrew was my parent's secret keeper and he still let Sirius spend thirteen years in Azkaban for something he didn't do." Harry barked out a harsh laugh. "Then he locked him up again once he escaped, shut him up in Grimmauld Place where he'd be 'safe'. I'm beginning to wonder about a lot of things, Tonks. Maybe you can see why?"

The Auror nodded her head in agreement. She could easily see why the saviour of the wizarding world was losing faith in the man everyone considered the greatest wizard alive. Her protective instincts kicked in and she shook herself out of her numb daze.

"I'll see what I can find out without raising too many flags and eyebrows, okay? I loved Sirius like a brother...he was my best friend

when I was younger, before...before they sent him away. I...I'll do what I can for you, Harry."

"That's all I can ask, Tonks. Sirius was family to me, too, so it's a very personal thing that his name be cleared. If you need to contact me, don't send an owl or try to do it too often here. I don't know if anyone else comes on duty between shifts. I'll find a way for you to get information to me, and I'll see what I can do about communicating with you without drawing too much attention."

"Will you tell me more of what's bothering you? I know this isn't all of it..."

"Eventually, yes, I'll tell you what I can. I just had to know that there was someone else I could trust...there's only so much us kids can do."

"I don't know about that, Harry. You 'kids' sure rocked everyone's world not too long ago. I think you guys can do a heck of a lot more than any of you think. Don't let that whole age thing get to you. I'm only twenty-two, y'know, and that's not a whole heck of a lot older than you are now."

"I'll keep that in mind, Tonks. Just keep in mind that Dumbledore uses Legilimency all of the time, so stay on your toes around him. You do use Occlumency, right?"

"I knew he was a Legilimens, and don't worry, part of our Auror training is to master Occlumency and Legilimency. I'll keep my shields up tight whenever I'm around him or any of the other Order members."

"Thanks, Tonks." Harry smiled his usual crooked smile. "Well, I guess I better get back to work on the flower beds before somebody wonders what I'm up to. Wander off a bit or I might accidentally get you with the water hose."

"I was meaning to ask how you knew I was here to begin with, mister."

"I heard you humming."

"No way! I wasn't being that loud!" Tonks looked offended that he had caught her on something so small.

"I heard you...it was really low, but I could tell it was close, so I threw something at the sound and there you were."

"You're a sneaky little scamp! Alright, let me get out of range before you start in with your bleeding water hose so the neighbours don't see the water doing something really strange in the middle of the yard." Tonks moved away, laughing the whole time about how it might look if someone did see the water running off of nothing like a fountain made of air.

Returning to his self-appointed tasks, Harry whistled quietly to himself. That had gone well, given that he hadn't planned to say anything to anyone that belonged to the Order. Soon enough, he'd find out if her oath was enough to keep their discussion under wraps.

July 12th, #4 Privet Drive

Apparating into a secluded place a few blocks from number four Privet Drive, Moody walked the short distance to the house, both eyes taking in everything there was to see. His invisibility cloak kept the muggles from seeing him, but there were ways to see through one and he couldn't afford to be followed. Arriving at the property, he spoke a quiet greeting to Kingsley once he spotted the younger Auror under his own invisibility cloak.

"Anything to report?" he asked in his usual gruff manner.

"No, not a bloody thing, which is good for us," Kingsley replied. "Potter was outside working in the back yard for an hour or so after I got here and I had to stay further away from him than I prefer to when he's outside, but I suppose it wasn't that big of a deal."

"Why'd you have to keep your distance?"

“He kept throwing weeds and dirt clods all over the place and I didn’t want to give myself away by getting hit. The water hose was the worst to avoid, though. Damn kid went after the yard like he had gone crazy for a while.”

“Yeah, that’s what Tonks told me he did yesterday, too. She thought it was pretty funny, though. Well, you’ve had a long night. Go on home, Kingsley. I’ve got the helm.”

“Thanks, Moody.” A ‘crack’ of sound, and the Senior Auror was gone.

Moody shook his head and turned to take a close look at the house. He didn’t know why Kingsley still had a chip on his shoulder when it came to Harry Potter, but he’d be willing to bet it had to do with Kingsley losing him a week or so back. Growling under his breath, he made mental note to have a talk with the Auror about it if it continued to affect his work in regards to the younger wizard.

According to what Kingsley and Albus had told him, the boy should be wandless, a fact that he thought was completely stupid and outright dangerous. Those two must be touched in the head to leave any wizard wandless in times like these. If the Death Eaters did attack, there’d be no way one of us could hold them off until help arrived. With Potter unarmed, those odds aren’t about to improve. I may have to see about accidentally slipping him a spare...

Dobby sensed the arrival of another wizard and quickly checked to see who it was. He quickly shook Harry awake, his large eyes wide with urgency.

“Master Harry, Dobby must be leaving...peg-legged wizard is here to be guarding you! Dobby is coming back later when hims is gone.” He gave his half awake master just a moment to acknowledge his words, and then he was gone.

“Dammit, I had things I was going to do this morning,” Harry grumbled under his breath and looked at the clock, which read nine o’ clock. “Guess I’ll get up now.” He wasn’t looking forward to going downstairs for something to eat, but there would be nothing else until Dobby was able to return, so he would at least need to grab a snack. Lately, it

seemed like he was eating three times what he used to. It must be something to do with this whole wizard maturity thing, he mused. I'll send 'Mione and the crew a letter and ask about it later. Rolling out of bed, he pulled some clothes out of his trunk and made his way to the loo.

Seeing no sign of a wand on the young wizard, Moody turned his attention to the rest of the household and observed their actions and reactions. He found it odd that the woman flinched when Harry's door opened and closed, but wrote it off as her being a jumpy old broad when nothing occurred to justify her reactions.

The Potter boy came downstairs and he really began to wonder what had been going on in the house. Petunia shrank back from him like he was going to hit her even though the young man did nothing but go to the ice box and pull out some fruit and the fixings for a sandwich. The younger Dursley was even worse – he fled the house as soon as Harry showed his face, hands covering his wide bum protectively as he scuttled out the door like a frightened cow.

Harry hadn't even looked at the two muggles as far as he could tell, so why were they so spooked? As far as he could tell, Harry was oblivious to his effect on his relatives, so Moody decided to have a little talk with Vernon Dursley. Something just wasn't right with those muggles.

Carrying his sandwich and apples upstairs to his room, Harry contemplated what he was going to do during Moody's shift. Then he remembered the nice wand shaped stick he'd brought in from the yard yesterday and grinned. He might not be able to cast the spells right now, but he could at least perfect the words and wand movements. Satisfied with his plan, he put the apples on his desk and settled in his chair to eat the sandwich before beginning the day's study plan.

Moody's attention was drawn back to Harry's room when he caught a low level flash of magic out of the corner of his magical eye's range of vision. Focusing on it immediately, he frowned and then started chuckling under his breath. If the look on the boy's face was any indicator, he hadn't expected anything to happen when he tried to

cast that spell. Watching more intently, he realized Harry was using a prop because the magic wasn't coming from the wand – it was coming from the young wizard's hand.

Well, bugger me! He's figured out how to teach himself wandless magic! Grinning wickedly, he nodded his approval. You just keep at it, boy. That'll save your life one day...maybe sooner than you think.

Starting with his first year Charms text, Harry picked up his 'wand' and moved it in the appropriate swish and flick motion while saying 'Wingardium Leviosa' under his breath. Nothing happened, but he felt his magic surge down his arm and disperse harmlessly from his hand before it could do anything focused. Curious if he could actually get it to work, he focused on one of his apples and repeated the spell with a great deal more concentration. The apple rose a few inches and thumped back down onto the desk when his surprise broke the spell.

Stunned, Harry stared at the apple and then began to grin like an idiot. Yes! I'll show them I don't need a wand! Working himself relentlessly for hours, Harry was oblivious to the sweat running down his face and his exhaustion until he tried to cast a simple charm and his vision greyed out. Swaying on his feet, muscles shaking, he looked at the clock through bleary eyes and froze in yet another moment of shock that day. He'd been working on wandless magic for over five hours. Sleep, gotta get some rest...Dobby'll wake me...

Watching to make sure the boy got to his bed without hurting himself, Moody smiled a grim little smile and made mental note to not underestimate Potter like so many of the other adults seemed to do. If a fifteen year old boy could show the initiative and drive to work five hours straight on wandless magic before he had to stop or pass out, then he deserved more than a little respect in Moody's book. Merlin's balls, I can't do that much wandless magic and I know what I'm doing, he mused and kept watch over the house and the sleeping wizard it sheltered.

Dobby returned to the house after checking to see if Moody was still around for the tenth time that day. Popping into his master's room, he cocked his head to one side and watched him sleep while observing his magic. Seeing no signs of flux or irregularity, he nodded his

approval and conjured a small table so he could put down the meal tray he'd brought before trying to wake Harry.

Stepping in, he gently shook Harry's shoulder and called his name.

"Master Harry is needing to wake up now. Dobby is back and is having yous dinner."

Harry groaned softly and tried to ignore the little elf. He was so exhausted that he wanted to do nothing more than sleep for the next week.

"Master Harry, yous must be eating. Yous is very hungry." Dobby shook him again, this time a little more insistently.

"Okay, Dobby, I'm awake...Merlin, I'm so tired." His stomach growled threateningly and he laughed a little. "I guess I'm hungry, too. Smells really good..." He sat up and immediately dug into the food the little elf had put on the table for him. "Thanks Dobby."

"Yous is being welcome, Master Harry. Did yous eat anything at all today while Dobby was having to be gone?" the elf asked, his concern evident.

"I had a sandwich and I was going to eat a couple apples, but I got distracted working on wandless magic. I was so tired I almost passed out...once I got to the bed, I think I did pass out." Harry sighed. "Is my appetite increasing because I'm getting closer to my magical maturity?"

"Yous magic is getting yous body ready for its growing up. Yous body will grow up with yous magic, so yous need much more food than usual. Master Harry must promise Dobby that hims will eat more when Dobby cannot be here to feed hims," the elf pleaded quietly and wrung his hands nervously. "The more magic yous uses, the more foods yous is needing."

"Is that why I was so tired? I used too much magic and didn't eat on top of it?" Dobby just nodded and Harry sighed again. "I'll be more

careful. I promise.” He smiled a little and went back to eating when Dobby relaxed visibly. “Anything going on at Hogwarts?”

“Dumbledore is still trying to fix some of his things that Master Harry broke weeks and weeks ago. Hims gets very angry when they fall apart again.” Dobby smiled gleefully. “Sometimes Dobby helps.”

Harry arched an eyebrow when his house elf’s smile took on a particularly malicious aspect right after that statement. Biting his lip, he snorted, eyes bright with amusement.

“Oh, I’m sure you help him all the time.” He sniggered and kept eating.

Feeling much better for having taken a nap and eaten a full meal, Harry pulled out a few sheets of parchment, his quill and ink pot. He had a few things to pass on to his friends and he figured he might as well get the letter written while he was thinking about it.

Hello everyone,

How are you all doing since your last visit with the Healer? Have you made any more progress? Let me know. I worry about all of you.

Things are the same here – the Dursley’s leave me alone and I leave them alone. I did some yard work and talked with Tonks. I think she’s on our side. Don’t worry about her too much, guys. I have her Witch’s oath that she won’t discuss anything we talked about with anyone living or dead unless I give her permission.

She wasn’t aware of any of the stuff that has been going on with me and she got really upset when I told her what was going on with Sirius before that night. Merlin, that still hurts like a bludger to the gut...I miss him, guys. I hate this. Anyway...she said she’ll find out what she can and send information once we think of a way to do it without giving away that Dobby is helping us. If you want to owl her, go ahead, but I can’t or Dumbledore will know something is up. We need all the options and advantages we can get and I’d appreciate your ideas on how to handle this.

I have a question for who ever knows the answer. Is it normal to be eating a LOT more when you're getting close to your magical maturity? I can't hardly get enough to eat in the last few days. Dobby has been happy running around keeping food in front of me and he says it's normal, but still...I'd appreciate any information you guys might have.

Oh! I started teaching myself wandless magic today! It's bloody exhausting, but it's manageable. Try doing spells with a stick that looks like a wand and focus like you do when you do the spells normally. Let me know if any of you have any luck with it, okay? Brilliant!

Harry

Rolling up the parchment, Harry tied it with a piece of string and wrote Hermione's name on the outside. Dobby picked it up before he had a chance to ask and was gone to deliver it. Chuckling to himself, he settled in to work on his Occlumency some more and discovered that his progress from earlier in the day had stuck with him. Slipping into a calm, quiet state of light meditation, he observed his shields and began adding to them again before going deeper into his own core and working on the actual organization of his thoughts and memories.

A badly deteriorated area of one wall drew his attention and he frowned. That wasn't there yesterday, he mused and moved closer to inspect it. It had the appearance of an arch or doorway that had been bricked over, and then covered with plaster to hide even that. Attacking the failing stucco and brickwork, Harry soon had room to stick his hands in so he could pull larger chunks of the wall down. As the opening expanded, he saw that it was just a deep alcove, but it was definitely not empty.

A large, old and ornate looking trunk sat in the space and he worked even harder to get to it. Many of his memories, like those of the Chamber of Secrets, had been locked away in trunks like this one but none of them were as big as this trunk.

Clearing the last of the obstructing brickwork away and banishing it, Harry turned his attention to the trunk itself. Stepping into the alcove,

he reached out and the trunk's lid popped open slightly at the touch of his hand. Throwing the lid back like he'd done with all the rest, he was hit with an unexpectedly large rush of memories and found himself being shaken awake by his irate house elf for the second time in one day. He had the grace to blush and look embarrassed when Dobby gave him a pointed look that said he had done something very Gryffindorish again.

"Uh, Hi, Dobby. I wasn't doing magic this time. I found another trunk full of memories and it turned out to have a lot more in it than I was expecting. My head really hurts...I think I'm just going to go get a couple aspirin and lay back down until my head stops hurting."

"Dobby will go gets yous a pain potion from Hogwarts. No more messing with memories or anything else magical today unless Dobby is here. Master promises?" The elf searched Harry's gaze with his own and seemed satisfied with his young Master's promise. "Dobby will be back soon. Yous be resting now."

"I promise," Harry stated. If it would get him one of Madame Pomphrey's pain potions, he was willing to promise just about anything right about now. Once his head stopped hurting so badly, he might consider trying to figure out what he had just done to himself. Having Dobby there to keep watch sounded like a really good idea, too. "I can be such an idiot sometimes," he muttered and tried to relax until Dobby returned.

July 13th, Ministry of Magic

"Please be seated so we may begin! Welcome to the 13th session of the 844th year of the British Wizengamot. This session is now open for business," Albus Dumbledore declared through use of the sonorous charm. Cancelling the spell, he rapped the table in front of him with a ceremonial gavel and smiled benignly at the representatives. "Before we move on to accept motions which will decide the new articles of legislation we will be voting upon today, does anyone have any new business to bring to the floor?"

Several members brought forward new legislation for review and a brief amount of time was spent introducing the concepts of the new

laws. In barely more than an hour, the floor was cleared, opening the way for motions that would start the voting on legislation from the previous session.

Watching the nobles around him, Albus smiled to himself and opened the floor to motions when the time came. The Potter proxy nodded to him when a motion was made regarding the bill he had introduced at the last session.

"I wish to make an amending motion regarding Law 2460, articles one through six, sections all, relating to the early emancipation of minor wizards," Baron Nott declared.

"Speak you amending motion, Baron Nott," Albus urged.

"I move for the exception requirement of a minimum of an Acceptable on all applicable O.W.L.s and N.E.W.T.s that was suggested to be made a minimum of Exceeds Expectations on all test scores be amended to read that an average of all applicable test scores on the O.W.L.s and N.E.W.T.s must equal no less than an Exceeds Expectations." Nott looked over the crowded room and nodded to a few.

"I understand and readily accept the need for a solid education before taking over the mantle of leadership over a family, but everyone excels in some fields and struggles in others. Averaging the scores takes that fact into account and gives a fair chance to all of our young Lords and Ladies." He bowed to the Wizengamot elders and returned to his seat.

A general murmur of agreement followed Nott's statements, and another Lord stood.

"I move to make Baron Nott's amendment a permanent part of the exceptions clause for Law 2460."

"I second that motion," another chimed in.

"The amendment is acknowledged and the appropriate changes will be made to the text of the legislation should it be passed into law."

Albus fumed a little – such an amendment could very well work in Harry's favour, but he doubted the boy's average would be an Exceeds Expectations, so he kept his pique to himself.

"I move that Law 2460 be brought up for vote before the noble members of the standing Wizengamot," Baron Nott declared and was seconded by Narcissa Malfoy, who was acting as proxy for her currently incarcerated husband.

"Law 2460, articles one through six, sections all, relating to the early emancipation of minor wizards will be voted upon now. Gentle wizards, please cast your votes of yea or nay or indicate your intention to abstain." Albus cast his own vote – for, of course – and sat back to observe the different cliques. Many individuals voted immediately, while others deliberated amongst themselves for several minutes before reluctantly voting one way or the other. Finally, all of the votes were tallied and Albus rapped his gavel to regain the attention of the members.

"Thank you for your attention to this matter, Noble members. Law 2460 has been passed by a majority vote of 78 for, 20 against and 2 abstains. What is the next motion?"

Voting on the subsequent laws and amendments as they came, Albus nodded to those he knew had voted for him on certain issues including the newest restrictions on magical creatures. Seeing no further motions, Albus stood, drawing all eyes to him. He smiled, twinkle on full blast.

"Are there any further motions, Noble members?" Seeing none, he nodded. "Is there anything further that anyone wishes to discuss or introduce at this time?" Again, there were no takers. "As all business has been concluded, I declare this 13th session of the 844th year of the British Wizengamot to be closed. Enjoy the rest of your weekend, my friends."

Pleased with how events had turned out despite the potential setback that Nott's amendment represented, Albus left the courtroom with a genuine smile on his face. Let's see the boy's damnable luck get him around this obstacle, he thought with a private chortle. Only an old

line Pureblood could manoeuvre around the clauses in this new law and that is something he most certainly is not. Sorry, Sirius. You have been out smarted once again. Whistling quietly, he headed for the Minister's office. He didn't like to let the man operate on his own for too terribly long without exerting his influence on him.

"Hello, Percy. How are you faring in your position with the Minister?" Albus asked the aspiring young politician. He didn't bother to inform the boy that he would never make it past his current position as a clerk. He lacked the drive and creativity to be anything else and his close connection to the political failure of Barty Crouch, Sr. was a further black smudge on his hopes for advancement.

"Hello, Professor Dumbledore. Things are going quite well, thank you for asking. I hope your affairs are going well, also." Percy stood a little straighter under Albus' gaze, the familiarity of the old man's grandfatherly smile soothing his worries and concerns just as it was intended to do.

"Everything is going well, indeed," Albus stated. "Is the Minister busy? I'd like to speak with him if he has a few minutes to spare."

"I'll see if he's busy, Professor. I'll be right back out." Excusing himself politely, Percy slipped into the Minister's office and nodded a greeting. "Sir? Professor Dumbledore is here to see you. Do you have a few minutes to meet with him?"

Torn between telling the manipulative old wizard to go to hell and dancing for joy to have him show up without being asked for help, Cornelius Fudge groaned under his breath. Invariably, a visit from Albus was nearly as bad as one from Lucius Malfoy. They both wanted him to do something with very little payback in return, but at least Albus had never threatened his life or the lives of his wife and children.

In the case of Lucius and the Dark Lord, he should probably be glad that their lives were the only price they had promised to extract if he failed. They could have demanded he take the Mark once he had taken enough money and overlooked enough evidence, but so far, they hadn't. Well, Lucius is safely locked away for the time being.

Maybe Albus can orchestrate some events to keep my chestnuts out of the fire the Daily Prophet seems bent on roasting them over. He's good for that kind of manoeuvring, at the very least.

"Send him in, Weatherby. I always have time for Albus."

Percy nodded and slipped out the door again. Holding it open for Albus, he smiled winningly.

"The Minister will see you now, Professor."

"Thank you, Percy. Hello, Cornelius, how have you been doing? Sherbet lemon?"

Relaxing into the calm, trusting feeling he always associated with Albus' presence, Cornelius smiled his best front page smile.

"Well enough considering the mess you created for me by proving that You Know Who is back," Cornelius grumbled half heartedly. "If I hadn't seen it with my own eyes..."

"But you did see Him, Cornelius, and seeing necessitates belief," Albus replied with a benevolent smile. "The papers have not been kind to you on the subject from what I have seen. What are you doing in the way of damage control?"

"You must be joking, Albus. Damage control?" The Minister looked at the elderly wizard like he had lost what little mind he had left and snorted his disgust. "Is there any such thing as 'damage control' in a situation like this?"

"There is always the possibility of damage control; no matter how bad the situation may seem at the time, nearly everything can be mended well enough to save a career. Admitting to your error and siding with Mr. Potter on this particular issue might go a long way towards regaining you some public goodwill. I will speak to Harry about writing a letter to the paper regarding your shared goals or something of the sort. By aligning your name with his good press image, you stand to gain more than you might possibly lose in admitting your error."

Fudge considered Albus' suggestion and couldn't really find any fault with it despite his reluctance to recant his previous statements about the boy saviour.

"I will consider your advice, Albus. I'm sure you're correct as usual."

"It certainly couldn't hurt," the Headmaster stated and smiled encouragingly. If Cornelius followed through on his advice, it would be Albus who saw a boost in public opinion for being right all along and for his unwavering support of the Boy Who Lived. It often paid to be the beleaguered voice of reason.

Satisfied with how his meeting had gone, Albus bid Cornelius good day and moved on to his next stop.

July 13th, #4 Privet Drive

Feeling considerably more cautious about what he opened or handled in his own mind after his experiences of the evening before, Harry settled in to meditate while Dobby pattered around the room cleaning things that couldn't possibly be in need of cleaning.

Focusing in on the organization of his memories, he began humming quietly to himself and relaxed into the calm of a light trance. Calling all unsorted memories to the area immediately around his mental self, he sat down on the floor in his Core and started sorting what appeared to be photographs. Smiling over a snapshot of himself and Hedwig, he focused on it completely and the 'photo' became animated as the memory played itself out. Seeing that particular moment of play with his first true best friend made his smile broaden considerably.

"Hedwig," he whispered happily and carefully placed the memory in the appropriate trunk. He picked up another and shook his head. "Dudley," he grumbled and tossed that memory into another trunk with a great deal less care than the first. He spent a while doing this until his rhythm was interrupted by a memory that he couldn't place – it appeared to be much older than his own memories and the scene it contained meant nothing to him.

"Hmm, I wonder where this came from," he mused quietly. Studying the memory, his frown deepened. He was fairly certain he had never set foot in an orphanage, yet here was this memory of living in just such a place. Why do I have this memory? It isn't mine. Is it?

Noting the difference in appearance, he called together the similar memories and started a pile at his side. Once he thought about it, he made a connection. These must have come out of that chest I opened yesterday, but who do they belong to? This is more than a little weird.

Tossing memories back into the chest at a fairly rapid pace, he paused when one captured his attention. The immediate focus was on several larger, clearly older boys who wore varying expressions of meanness and laughter. The sight was so familiar from his own experiences with Dudley that he had to know what this other child had experienced. Focusing in on it, he immersed himself in the memory.

The smaller of the two older boys stepped in shoving him back against the wall hard enough to bump his head. Blinking to clear his eyes when they watered, he snarled at the gathered bullies and their small audience.

"Leave me alone!" he demanded, voice still high and sharp for his age.

"What's little Tommy-boy going to do about it, huh?" the largest retorted meanly. "We've got you all alone today, freak. Mrs. Williamson is too drunk to help you this time."

"Tommy-boy! Tommy-boy!" a couple other boys chanted in the background, their excitement clearly evident. "Tommy-boy!"

"Don't call me that! I'll hurt you worse than you've ever been hurt before!"

"Awww, what's a little private school squirt like you gonna do to me?" The older boy stepped in to deal his own blow and let out a high pitched cry of pain when a foot connected between his legs hard

enough to drop him to the ground. The others froze, stunned that someone had hurt their leader.

“I told you I’d hurt you,” Tom stated coldly and proceeded to viciously kick the other boy while he lay on the ground. Whimpers and garbled pleas made it to his ears and he sneered, his awareness of the remaining onlookers deepening the pleasure he felt in this victory. “You want me to stop? Oh, no, I don’t think so. You said it yourself. Mrs. Williamson is too drunk to help anyone today.”

Panting heavily, Harry wrenched himself out of the memory and found himself back in his own room under the watchful gaze of a very concerned house elf. Pulse racing and face flushed from the excitement, pleasure and satisfaction that he had felt while he relived Tom’s memory of hurting the older bully, he swallowed convulsively.

Fighting down the surge of nausea that followed his realization that he had enjoyed being able to hurt someone who had caused him so much difficulty so many times before, he wrestled with his own fears and concerns about the state of his sanity. He knew this wasn’t his memory, but he could so easily replace the other boy with Dudley or Piers and then his satisfaction would be complete. Shaking, he swallowed convulsively and wondered just how much like Tom he really was.

“Oh Merlin, no...oh no...This can’t be happening now...”

Translations:

Oc Dager – Goblin for Young Warrior

Sheklac – Goblin for Chieftain

“He who fights with monsters might take care lest he thereby become a monster. And if you gaze for long into an abyss, the abyss gazes also into you.”

Friedrich Nietzsche

July 13th, Ministry of Magic

Strolling into the reception area for the Director of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, Albus Dumbledore popped a sherbet lemon into his mouth and paused beside the desk while he waited for the young woman to notice him.

Looking up from her paperwork, the young receptionist blushed and smiled up at the renowned Headmaster Dumbledore. “Hello, Headmaster Dumbledore! I’m sorry for making you wait. What can I do for you today?”

Smiling at Amelia’s assistant, twinkle at its grandfatherly best, Albus nodded in reply to her greeting.

“Hello, my dear. I’m here to see Director Bones. Is she available?”

“I’ll check for you.”

“Excellent.” Taking the time to reinforce his Occlumency shields as was his wont before any meeting, he moved over to the side and conjured his favourite poufy chair rather than sit in one of the ones that was available. “Take your time, my dear. There’s no hurry.”

Amelia looked up from scanning an anonymous note for hexes, tracking charms and portkeys when she heard a quiet knock on her doorjamb.

“Yes, Angela?”

“Headmaster Dumbledore is here to see you, Madame Bones. Do you have time for a meeting?”

Sighing to herself, Amelia smiled and nodded even though she wanted nothing more than to find out what was in the note she held. It looked as if it would have to wait for a little while longer.

"I have a little time before my meeting with the Senior Aurors. Please send the Headmaster in." She frowned. "Angela?"

"Yes, Madame Bones?"

"Do you happen to recall who dropped this note off? Has anyone in particular been into the office today?"

"A lot of Aurors have been in and out as usual, ma'am. I don't recall seeing anyone different or unexpected other than the Headmaster."

Amelia nodded and forced her contemplative look to mould itself into a slight smile.

"Alright, then. Go ahead and send my meeting back to me, Angela."

"Director Bones will see you now, Headmaster. It was good to see you again."

"It was a pleasure to see you again, as well, Ms. McKinnon. Have a pleasant day." Wandering back to Amelia's office, Albus walked in with a cheerful smile. "Hello, Amelia, how are you today?"

"I'm well, Headmaster Dumbledore. What brings you down to the DMLE?"

"I just finished dismissing the Wizengamot session and thought it might be nice to visit with a few friends while I was here at the Ministry." Keeping his twinkle going despite her less than enthusiastic reception, Albus sought an opening to bring her in under his influence. "Has the Minister allowed for increased Auror recruiting yet? Now that Voldemort's return is an acknowledged fact, I'd think he would understand your need and the need of the people."

"I am currently negotiating with Minister Fudge on that very issue, Headmaster. You needn't go out of your way to speak to him."

"I would be happy to speak to him for you on the off chance that my advice might be heard more clearly. Merlin knows we need every wand focused on defence that we can get these days."

"I don't think that will be necessary, Headmaster, but thank you for the offer. I have everything well in hand." Amelia wondered what the manipulative old man was up to. Between the vague sense of unease she always felt in his presence and the information she remembered from her time under Alastor Moody's tutelage at the Auror Academy, she didn't need to be reminded that Albus Dumbledore was a man to be cautious of both on the battle field and in the political forum. "Is there anything else you wanted to discuss with me, Headmaster? I have my Senior Aurors coming in for a meeting now."

"No, I do believe that will be all, Amelia. Have a good meeting and let me know if I can be of any assistance. There are many who would answer my call, after all." Smiling congenially after issuing his vaguely combined threat and offer of information, Albus stood and left the stubborn witch's presence.

Why won't she relax her stance? It shouldn't require any effort at all to at least ensure that she would relax enough to use my first name, but the damnable woman has always resisted my wiles in a most stubborn manner. Albus grumbled to himself and wondered if Kingsley Shacklebolt might not make a more malleable Director for the DMLE.

Perhaps she is as accomplished an Occlumens as Severus has intimated. If so, I will have to work a little harder to break through her defences the next time we speak. If everything is to go according to plan, I must have the cooperation of the DMLE in the coming months.

Albus continued his wonderings and kept on his way to find out what information Arthur Weasley had managed to cull from his fellow low level ministry employees. Cornelius is in a position that wields considerable more power and prestige than any other official, yet he is the most malleable of the upper level politicians. Perhaps Amelia thinks she is immune to the ups and downs of politics in her position as Director of the DMLE. Maybe it's time to make her reconsider her

thoughts on the matter. I will have her cooperation or I will replace her with someone who will give me what I want.

Motioning her Aurors in, Amelia waited while they conjured seating and settled before opening with an unexpected inquiry.

“Who knows anything about Dumbledore’s real involvement in this war against You Know Who?”

Surprised and a little nervous when faced with such a direct query regarding Dumbledore’s involvement in the war effort, Kingsley twitched almost unnoticeably and spoke up to laude the elderly wizard’s character.

“Albus is a great symbol for the Light, Director. He leads by example. After all, he did kill the last Dark Lord.”

“Actually, Kingsley, technically, Mr. Potter managed that feat. You Know Who may be back now, but in my book, anything that spends over a decade without a body to call its own is a spirit of some kind and can only be classified as dead. Unfortunately for us, You Know Who didn’t have the decency to lie down and stay that way.” Amelia smiled a little. “So, what else do we know of the Headmaster’s actual role, intended or otherwise, in this war?”

Conversation bantered back and forth for several minutes with no real information changing hands, by which point Amelia had heard and seen enough.

“Alright, on to our next important consideration. Are we seeing an increase in Death Eater activities, or is everything holding steady? Should we expect and plan for an attack on Azkaban in the near future? Does anyone have any ideas about what You Know Who might actually be up to?”

“With a the overall majority of his suspected or known Inner Circle rotting in Azkaban, we have to assume that You Know Who will make a concerted attack on the prison before moving forward with any major recruitment campaigns. He’ll need his most experienced people to train the new blood that is being brought into the fold,”

Auror Robards commented. "It's just a matter of time and we all know it. The signs of more focused raiding activity are increasing day by day. We had three small raids just last night alone, and yes, the Dark Mark was confirmed to be present over the homes. There were clear signs of fighting, but no bodies were found. They appear to be taking prisoners at this time and I'd rather I didn't have a good idea of why, but those of us who were around for the last war are thinking it's for a Revel or a large group of Initiations. I don't want to think about it too hard, but we don't have much choice."

"Does anyone else have anything to offer?" Amelia asked and let out a frustrated sigh when everyone else seemed to bow to Robards' logic – they had very little useful intelligence information at this point and most of what they did have came from past experience, not current events. "Very well. Get your people out there and try to find out what these damn Death Eaters are up to! I refuse to force our people sit on their hands and wait for things to get as bad as they did during the last war before we do something about it!"

Studying each of her Senior Aurors in turn, she made no attempt to soften her regard or her tone. "I want this problem curbed as much as we are able with our current manpower. I'm working on getting you more aurors. Yes, I know that many trainees take time to get into their groove, but if I can set each of our existing aurors with a new trainee, that will double our force and greatly improve our chances of getting through this war with minimal casualties. Get out there and get to work, people!"

Sitting back in her chair as her office cleared, Amelia shook her head and wondered what she was getting herself into. She had started out her day by cold shouldering Albus Dumbledore – a potentially fatal political move – and finished it off so far by all but promising something she couldn't follow through on unless she could intimidate Fudge enough to make him give her the okay to start hiring and training new Aurors immediately.

"Dammit!" She snapped at the air and let out a breath abruptly, the sudden exhalation moving the note she had been trying to find the time to read for over an hour now. Focused by the subtle movement,

she had the note in her hands and opened before she could second guess herself about it again.

Director Bones,

Due to a Magical Oath I swore to the source of part of this information, I am not at liberty to reveal myself or speak as freely as I would wish to at this point in time. Should I receive permission to freely discuss what I know, I will gladly come to you and share everything I have learned to date regarding the following issue.

The first item of business I feel I must bring to your attention is a splinter group in the fight against You Know Who called The Order of the Phoenix. I am aware that the Order's existence is not specifically secret, but most of its members are not commonly known for their affiliation. The Order as a whole means well, and I will remain a member until the situation becomes untenable but I no longer feel the same unwavering trust and belief in their goals and effectiveness in the coming war. Due to my Oath to the Order, I cannot give you specific information on the activities and meeting place of the Order, but I am not held from giving you the names of its members. The following individuals are known to me as active members.

Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore – Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot and Founder of the Order

Alastor Moody – Retired Senior Auror

Arthur Weasley – Department of Muggle Artefacts

Kingsley Shacklebolt – Senior Auror

Nymphadora Tonks – Auror

There are many other members, but these are the ones that I felt would interest you the most. Please understand that we all joined the Order thinking we were standing with the greatest force against You Know Who. I have recently learned that my beliefs and thoughts on the matter may have been uninformed at best.

Loyal to the Light

Shocked, Amelia read the letter several more times before fully appreciating what this anonymous individual had just offered her. Two of her current Aurors and one of the most respected, albeit eccentric, retired Aurors appeared to be under Dumbledore's thumb unless it was one of them had delivered the information to her. Planning to meet individually with each person on this short list with the exception of Albus Dumbledore, she smiled genuinely for the first time in weeks. The news wasn't specifically good, but it also wasn't particularly bad; on the contrary, this could easily work to her advantage in the near future.

July 14th, The Burrow

"I've been thinking about a few things for a little while now, guys. Maybe you can help me finish working it out," Ron commented once he was settled under Ginny's oak tree with his sister and Hermione.

Hermione nodded encouragingly. "Just tell us what's on your mind, and we'll go from there."

Ron looked to Ginny, then back to Hermione and nodded resolutely. Gathering his thoughts, he sighed and stared off into the distance. He abruptly focused on Hermione.

"This may mean nothing or everything, but here goes. Um, when we went after the Philosopher's Stone, we started out as a group. I got knocked out at the chess set. Did you make it all the way to the end with Harry?"

"No, there was only enough flame freezing potion for one of us to get through the fire trap on the door that led forward. Harry went on alone and I used the potion that let me go back so I could get help for you and alert the other Professors to the situation."

"So only one person could have gone forward, no matter what?"

"Yes, Ron. Only one." Hermione sat forward, curiosity shining brightly in her eyes. "Where are you going with this?"

"Bear with me and let me finish before you ask a lot of questions, okay. There are a lot more pieces to put into place first. I think you'll see the big picture a lot faster this way than you would if I just told you what I'm seeing," the red head stated. "Now we move on to year two and the Chamber of Secrets. I doubt we ever would've figured out what the monster was without your help, y'know, Hermione." He smiled when his friend blushed at the praise. "You were petrified and couldn't go with us that time. A cave in kept me and Lockhart from advancing on into the Chamber with Harry. Yet again, he faces the monster alone."

Frowning, Ginny began to get an inkling of where her brother might be headed with his thoughts, but she remained quiet. She wanted to hear what else he had to say. He was much more thoughtful since his experience in the Brain Room at the Ministry, and this was but one example of how much time he spent thinking things out now.

"Go on."

"Third year was a bit of a fluke, I think. We were actually able to be with him through everything."

"He had to face the Dementors alone," Hermione whispered. "I could barely think with all of them so close...I could barely watch, let alone actually try to help him...that was all Harry." She flushed with embarrassment.

"Okay, so year three wasn't entirely a fluke," Ron muttered and sat back to rethink his idea with the new information Hermione had provided. "Year four, the tournament, he was alone for every task when it came down to it. This past year, he was at least alone with Bellatrix and You Know Who for a little while. We'll have to talk to him to find out exactly what happened."

"Did you ever wonder why Professor Snape showed up at the Shrieking Shack when he did?" Hermione arched an eyebrow at Ron and nodded. "I see where you're going with this, Ron. He didn't have to be alone all those other times. It sure seems like someone made

sure he was alone. The same someone who knows almost everything that goes on at Hogwarts, maybe?"

"You prove yet again why everyone says that you are the smartest witch of your age," Ron complimented with a grin. "Just when Harry is about to find out something important, Snape shows up and tries to mess everything up. I don't think anyone counted on the three of us attacking a teacher..." He growled under his breath and shook his head.

"What I don't understand is why. We had Wormtail, so clearing Sirius' name would have been a snap. Harry could've gone to live with Snuffles and Remus and he'd have been happy. He'd have been stronger than ever. Why keep him away from the people who care about him the most? Hell, Mum would take him in before you could finish saying the words to ask if it was okay for him to move in at the Burrow. Why leave him with those muggles?"

"Chess." Ginny looked at both of them with wide, sad eyes. "Think about it like moves for a game of chess. Sirius' love and support or the love and support he'd have gotten living here, would have changed Harry from a pawn to a King..."

Horried by the implications of that statement, the other two teens just stared at her and tried to process that sinister thought.

July 15th, St. Mungo's, Office of Master Mind healer Octavius Monroe

"I've never been more frightened in my life," Neville stated, gaze on the wall behind Healer Monroe. The experience of living his memories again with the Healer present had put many things into perspective and he finally felt comfortable talking about some of the things that had happened.

"It amazes me how bloody stubborn and stupid Harry can be sometimes. I don't know what would have happened if he had done as Hermione and I asked and left the prophecy on the shelf, but it's a moot point now, I guess."

“Yeah, that was one of his less inspired moments,” Ginny commented with a giggle.

“Oh, leave off it,” Ron grumbled. “Harry doesn’t think strategically. He acts on instinct...impulse...whatever you want to call it. Yeah, it might have been a bad decision. It might also be the only decision that could have led to all of us being here, alive and whole.”

“Uh, that sounds an awful lot like divination talking there, Ron. I thought you didn’t buy into that sort of stuff,” Hermione ventured cautiously.

“Ronald has gained much from his experience with the brains,” Luna mused dreamily. “Unfortunately, it was at great personal cost. He isn’t speaking from the point of view of a Seer, Hermione. He is speaking as a Master of strategy who sees the moves he will make further ahead than the rest of us can really comprehend.”

Slowly settling back in his seat, Healer Monroe did his best to remain unobtrusive; listening carefully to everything the teens had to say, he kept mental notes for later review. Perhaps Ron would open up about his attack now that he was in a different environment.

As a group, the young people refocused on Neville and sat forward eagerly. Ginny patted the nervous young man’s knee and smiled encouragingly.

“What else is on your mind, Nev?”

“We relied on each other and we took care of each other just like we were supposed to do. When we thought we had lost part of the group, all we could think about was making sure we got everyone out,” Neville murmured. “It felt good to be part of something even though I really messed up a couple of times. I still can’t believe I disarmed Harry the same time I did it to the Death Eater. I was horrified...”

“We all botched things up at different times that night, Nev. The important thing is what we’re doing now – we’re here, alive and talking about it.” Ginny declared her thoughts proudly, brown eyes full of fire. “The only other thing that matters is that we learn from it and

don't make the same mistakes next time. You all know there will be a next time."

"I know," Neville agreed. "Believe me, I do understand that now. It really helped to see the memories from a different perspective. I think I'll get a Pensive eventually." He sighed. "The biggest thing that sticks out for me is how I feel now when I remember the point when Dumbledore and the others showed up. At the time, I felt like we had been saved by this great and wonderful man...now, all I can do is wonder why it took them so long to get to us and why Dumbledore didn't do more to help..."

"I think we're all starting to wonder about that," Ron mused quietly. He looked at his sister and his friends and fidgeted uncomfortably. He couldn't seem to block out the memory of that night right now. It felt like it was clawing its way to the surface no matter how hard he tried to bury it deeper in the back of his head.

"I remember the first time we saw the brains at the Department of Mysteries," Ron muttered, gaze distant as he lost himself in the memories of that unforgettably horrifying night. He could see them as clearly now as he did that night.

In the very middle of the room, an enormous glass tank of deep green liquid, big enough for all of them to swim in; a number of pearly-white objects were drifting around lazily in it... Glimmering eerily, they drifted in and out of sight in the depths of the green liquid, looking something like slimy cauliflowers...

"Aquavirius Maggots, Luna called them...said something about the Ministry breeding the things..." Ron shuddered visibly. "They are breeding them, those brain things...you were right about that part, Luna."

Healer Monroe forced himself to be still and remain in the background as Ron finally began to speak of his own trauma. Relaxing bit by bit, he nodded encouragingly when Hermione caught his gaze and smiled tremulously. They didn't need him right now and that fact didn't bother him at all. This was the most effective method of healing for this closely knit group of friends.

"They were awful to see," Hermione agreed quietly and hugged herself, the fingers of one hand absently rubbing at the place on her chest where the scar Dolohov had given her began. "We were all so badly hurt by then...by the time you got hurt. What exactly happened?"

"One of the Death Eaters hit him with a powerful Confundus charm," Ginny replied. "Between being hurt and Confunded, well...he was already half out of his mind. Then he accioed that thing..."

"Parts of it, I remember perfectly," Ron commented, his tone flat and lifeless. "I don't think I've ever felt so much pain in my life. Once it latched onto me, all I could do was scream and try to tear it off of my chest..." Ignorant of the tears that were running down his face, Ron panted softly and lost himself in the memory of having his mind invaded by the Brain creature for the first time since it had happened.

A brain burst from the green liquid like a leaping fish: for a moment it seemed to hang suspended in midair, then it soared towards him, and what looked like ribbons of moving images flew from it, unravelling like rolls of film...the moment they made contact with his skin, the tentacles began wrapping themselves around his arms like ropes, thin ribbons spinning around his chest now; he tugged and tore at them as the brain was pulled tight against him like an octopus's body. Pain exploded through his mind as the creature's awareness impacted his own and the sheer volume of possibilities that stretched out before him was too much to comprehend.

"It was dying by the time I caught it...being out of whatever stuff they live in for more than a second or two is more than they can take...it pushed its...thoughts into me...made me see like they see...so many possibilities going on and on into infinite nothingness..."

The infinite spread of possibilities shrank suddenly as the creature died and all he could see were his own possibilities...the results of his own choices and actions...

Ron whimpered softly, the flow of alien thought still an uncomfortable, unwelcome pressure in his mind. Arms held him tightly against a

warm, sweet smelling body and he gave in to the raw pain the memories awoke in him.

Unwilling to disturb Ron's cathartic tears, Healer Monroe gestured Neville over so as not to interrupt the others in their support of the red head's healing. Speaking quietly, he explained his summons.

"Would you like to see what I can repair from the Obliviate or would you prefer to wait until next visit? I know this has been an eventful and emotionally overwrought day already."

Neville considered the option carefully and frowned. He wasn't sure what would be dredged up if the Mind Healer was able to repair even part of the damage done to him by the old Obliviate spell, but he figured he was already dealing with a lot of old issues – what was one more? With that in mind, he sighed expressively.

"Let's go ahead and see what you can do today. At this point, I'm a fan of getting things done."

Octavius just smiled and nodded his approval of the young man's attitude.

"Excellent. Just relax and let me work, Mr. Longbottom. This may feel a little strange, but do not hesitate to tell me if you feel discomfort or anything beyond an ache or tugging sensation. Do you understand?"

"Yes, perfectly."

"Then let's begin." Healer Monroe entered the young wizard's mind through the unique brand of Occlumency used by Mind Healers and homed in on the damage and residue left behind by an uncalled for Obliviate spell. Carefully unravelling threads of the spell's fabric, he exposed memories and areas of mental process that were critical keys to fully controlling magical ability. Shaking after nearly an hour of intensely focused work, Octavius slowly pulled his consciousness out of Neville's mind and steadied the boy.

"I have managed to unravel part of it, and more of it may release with careful work, but I am tiring and I won't chance a mistake. Take the

next few days to get used to what this session has done and let me know when you're ready to continue." He squeezed the younger wizard's shoulder companionably and chuckled when he realized the other four teens were watching them with open fascination. "How are all of you feeling?"

"It gets easier every day," Hermione responded.

"And every one of these sessions makes us better at handling everything," Ron murmured. "Thanks, Healer Monroe."

"You are all welcome. I am just glad to be able to help."

July 15th, #4 Privet Drive

"Dursley, what the bloody hell has been going on in this house?" Moody focused both eyes on the shaken but angry muggle. "You people act as if Potter has done something to scare you out of your wits."

"He had his wand out doing freakish things with it," Vernon declared. Seeing a possible opportunity to get the little bastard in trouble with the rest of the freaks, he pressed on. "I thought you bloody people were supposed to expel him for that! He threatened to harm my wife and me when we kindly asked him to do chores..."

Moody snorted at that. He didn't doubt that Potter might have threatened the big fat muggle, but he didn't think the boy would follow through on it.

"Has a wand, you say? And he performed magic without receiving any owls?"

"That's what I said. Can't you hear or something?" Vernon backed off a step at a nasty glare from the old and grizzled auror.

"Interesting," Moody muttered with a smirk, then turned to bellow at the ceiling. "Potter, come down here now!"

Harry froze when he heard Moody yell for him from the living room. Did he see my wand? Did Vernon tell him? Damn it to hell! He trotted downstairs, pushing his glasses up as he went.

“Yeah, Moody? What’s up?”

“Let me see your wand, Potter.” Moody held out his hand and gestured demandingly.

Harry bowed up a little, his tone sharpened by the anger he still felt over the theft of his original wand.

“I don’t have my wand. It was taken from me.”

“Dursley here tells me you have a wand. Don’t play games with me, Potter. I’m not going to take it away from you. Bloody fool thing to take your wand to begin with,” Moody growled, magical eye spinning as he looked for any sign of a wand besides his own. Finding none, he arched an eyebrow at Harry. “Well? Go get it, lad. I don’t have all day.”

Glaring daggers at Vernon, Harry nodded and reluctantly went back upstairs to his room. Opening his trunks, he ignored the call of his new wand and selected one of the other wands that felt close to his old phoenix wand in compatibility to carry down. Closing everything back up, he returned to the retired auror’s side with the same visible reluctance in his stride.

“You won’t take this one away from me, too?”

“No, Potter, you have my word I won’t leave you without a wand. Now hand the bloody thing over.” Taking the wand, Moody cast *Priori Incantatem* and arched an eyebrow when the last spell cast registered as the *cruciatuus*. Eyeing Harry curiously, he muttered a couple more spells that caused the wand to glow blue, then a reddish orange before returning to normal. He handed it back.

“I don’t know how you got that or where you got it from and I definitely don’t know you have it,” he declared with a mischievous smirk. “But, if

someone were to press you about how you got another wand, you got it from me. Understand?"

"Yes, thank you." Harry relaxed visibly and nodded his understanding. "What did you do to it that you didn't do?"

"Sharp lad," Moody approved. "I erased the priori record and removed the Ministry tracking charms, so be the responsible lad that I know you are, Potter. Don't make me regret doing this."

"You won't regret it." Harry grinned crookedly.

"Keep working on your wandless casting all the same," Moody stated gruffly and tipped his bowler hat to Harry, then walked out to continue his shift on guard duty.

"I told you I wouldn't get in trouble for using magic," Harry stated, then spun on his heel and returned to his room, leaving a fuming and furious Vernon behind. The fact that he now had two mostly untraceable wands was not lost on him and he grinned as he tucked the wand he'd shown to Moody in his back pocket.

July 15th, Gringotts

Deep below the lobby of the Goblin run bank of Wizarding London, two letters vanished from a desk in a vault that was clearly the property of an old and wealthy family. The letters reappeared in Griphook's In Box and he immediately snatched them up, only to pause when he realized they were not from Harry. Looking at them a little more closely, his eyes widened with surprise. Hurrying to the owl roost to mail the letters, he went to the first two of the larger owls and attached each letter to its own imposing Eagle owl. The Goblin stepped back and the owls took flight.

Watching the owls disappear into the distance, Griphook smiled a toothy smile of gleeful anticipation. The events those two letters might set into motion would interact with everything that was going on around young Harry Potter and the potential for chaos was greater than anything the tribes had seen in almost a century.

July 16th, French Ministry of Magic

A tall, well dressed man with greying light brown hair strode purposefully through the halls of the French Ministry of Magic. Eyes followed his progress and many smiled as they recognized his familiar presence. Stepping onto one of the lifts, his soft, hoarse sounding voice requested the Le Service du Magique être and he disappeared when it shuddered into motion.

Stepping out of the lift, Remus walked up to the receptionist's desk and smiled warmly, his amber eyes filling with a mischievous light when the young woman looked him over and blushed.

"I'm here to see Madame Laroche."

Taking in the very well dressed, handsome wizard who stood before her, the younger witch smiled back in what she hoped was a charming manner. Picking up a small square of enchanted paper, she arched an eyebrow at him.

"Your name, Monsieur?"

"Remus Lupin."

Jotting down the message that she had a visitor and the man's name, she tapped the paper with her wand, causing it to fold itself and vanish.

"Please have a seat, Mr. Lupin. I'll let you know when Madame Laroche is available to meet with you."

"Thank you, Mademoiselle." Remus seated himself and smoothed his lightweight, elegant blue robes. Aware of the receptionist's gaze, he smiled to himself and picked up a copy of the Paris magical newspaper. Sirius would have already gotten her name, address and a date for this evening, he mused wistfully. He always was a sly, smooth dog when it came to women. Sighing unhappily, he forced himself to focus on the paper. One article caught his eye and suddenly his attention was no longer forced.

UNPROVOKED ATTACKS BAFFLE AURORS

In recent days, there have been several unexplained killings in Le Magique Centre Commercial. All of the victims have been half blood or muggle born witches and wizards who were travelling alone or had, perhaps, been lured away from their companions. None of the victims appear to be connected to each other in any other way, and this reporter is most concerned about what the Aurors and our Bureau du Maintien de L'ordre Magique are doing to find the culprits of these crimes.

All Wizards and Witches are strongly encouraged to travel in groups and to never go out without your wand. This precaution is especially important to those of half blood or muggle born descent. Please be prepared to defend yourselves and report any suspicious activities that you see while going about your daily business.

More on Pg. 05

On a desk further back in the department, a note appeared out of thin air next to a slender, finely boned hand. Margaux Laroche arched an eyebrow at the unexpected note and tapped it with her wand to open it. Upon reading its contents, she smiled her delight.

“Remus! It’s about time you got back!,” she declared and scrawled a quick response to the receptionist.

Pursing her lips in a brief moue of disappointment, the receptionist discarded Margaux’s reply and called to Remus quietly to get his attention.

“Madame Laroche will see you now, Monsieur Lupin. She said you would be able to find the location of her office without mishap, but if you wish it, I could walk you back...”

“That won’t be necessary, my dear, but I do appreciate your offer,” Remus replied and rose gracefully, mind spinning with the thoughts one small newspaper article had spawned. “I am here on a very regular basis.”

“Well, if you’re certain, then have a good meeting.”

Wandering through a veritable maze of cubicles and offices, Remus followed his friend’s scent until he found her in her newest office – a perfect spot in the corner with a large window. Having paused to speak to several other people he knew well, the news of her promotion was merely confirmed by the sight of her current locale.

“Hello, Madame Assistant Director Margaux Laroche.”

“Remus! It’s been months since you stopped in! How are you doing, hmm, you old Loup?” Smoothing the tall werewolf’s dark blue robes, Margaux urged him to have a seat. “Bring me up to date on what kept you away for so long.”

“I was in Ireland for a Council Meeting and I recently stopped through the Russian and German Ministries,” Remus replied, tone hardening as he thought about what he had learned. “I’ve either seen signs or have heard reliable accounts of Death Eater activity as far east as Romania and it’s almost all about recruitment. From the looks of your own newspaper, however, it’s about sowing fear and dissent as well.”

“I read that article, the one about the deaths in the shopping district,” Margaux murmured. “The Aurors are still trying to confirm the exact cause of death. They believe it might have been the death curse, but there is some question. The Beauvais twins wanted me to ask you to go see them once you showed your face again, so I can only assume they have need of your knowledge of this Dark Lord and his minions.”

“I was planning on paying them a visit anyway,” Remus murmured. “What have you heard about the situation in Britain?”

“I try to keep up with what is going on, but lately I just don’t know what to think, Remus. These new laws for unregistered werewolves and magical creatures in general are poorly thought out and the very fact that they were voted into active enforcement worries me even more. I and my fellow department heads are expecting a possible secondary revolt on top of the already unstable environment caused by You Know Who and we wouldn’t be surprised by a major influx of immigrants from most walks of the magical community of the British

Isles. They may not all come to us here in France, but they will certainly be fleeing to the continent. Our laws are less restrictive and there are more opportunities for them to prosper.”

“I know what you mean. If I didn’t have reason to go back, I would stay here in Paris,” Remus admitted reluctantly, then snorted gracelessly. “Albus Dumbledore made a lot of promises, but none of them have come through and I have begun to seriously doubt his integrity. Most of the Werewolf Tribes have agreed to not join forces with Voldemort, but some are going to because they see it as an opportunity for revenge on the Ministry.”

“Albus Dumbledore has not been fighting these laws? Are you certain of that?” Margaux couldn’t hide her shock at the idea that Albus Dumbledore would shirk his duty so blatantly.

“I haven’t had a chance to view his voting history, but I plan to do so as soon as I return to London. I know he could have done more if he had tried to stop some of the laws, and so far I see no evidence of him trying to stop them.”

“Oh, that is not good, Remus...that is not good at all. Please be careful, Vieux Loup. Everything I am hearing points to open war soon...a war like you experienced those years ago. We are all very wary of this Dark Lord. If he is victorious on British soil, he may turn his gaze to the continent and no one here wants that... Doux Merlin, non. Do me a favour and survive this one, too, okay.”

Smiling fondly at the older witch, Remus nodded solemnly. Standing, he hugged her firmly and sighed into her hair. Part of him wanted to stay here where people accepted him so easily, but the rest of him knew he had to return to London – he had a duty to fulfil to his people and to his Cub.

“I will do my best, Mon Amie.”

After talking for a while longer and catching up on all that his friend had been up to for the past few months, Remus left Margaux’s office in the Department of Magical Creatures (Le Service des Créatures Magiques) and headed for The Department of Magical Transportation

(Le Service du Transport Magique). He spotted the person he wanted to talk to the moment he stepped into the reception area.

“Bonjour, Océane! How are you, Mon Amie?” Remus greeted the elegantly distinguished woman with a fierce hug and a kiss on each cheek. “How do you like it over here in the Monitoring office?”

“It is very new and quite fascinating,” Océane replied with an affectionate smile. “Come, join me for a café in my office and we will catch up on what Mon grand méchant loup has been up to. You look like you have at least been eating properly of late,” she commented motheringly. “I am worried about you, Remus. Things are becoming quite untenable on the Isles.”

“I know it’s bad, but I have to go back. My Cub is there.”

“You always speak of this Cub, Remus...get him out of there, too! Bring him to Paris with you. Surely he would have a better life here than he has in London right now.”

“You Know Who is after him, Océane. Harry would never let me take him away and endanger more people.” Remus stated. “That much I know for certain.”

“Why would You Know Who be after a child? He is but a boy, non?”

“He’ll be 16 soon,” Remus replied. “That’s a long ways from being a mere boy when you’re Harry Potter.”

“Oh! I did not know that he was the one you spoke of! Did he truly survive the Death curse like the stories say he did?”

“Yes, he did.”

“That poor, dear child. Well, at least he has a good man like you to look after him.” Océane sighed and shook her head despairingly. “Did Margaux tell you that the Beauvais twins have been asking after you?”

“Yeah, she told me. It must be serious if they have you passing on the message, too.”

“I have been working with them on a project in the Bureau du Maintien de L'ordre Magique. We do not just monitor Portkey and apparition travellers. We are tracking them and mapping where they come from and go to.”

Intrigued by the possible applications for that kind of information, Remus sat forward eagerly.

“What have you been able to find out so far?”

“We have had a busy time so far this month,” the older witch mused. “It has mostly been unregistered portkeys that are tripping the monitoring spells we have in place. The people know to not make them, but does that stop them? Non, of course not.” She frowned a little and shook her head. “The twins will be able to show you where the majority of the offenders are coming from, but I want to say it is from your area.”

“Do you track apparition as strictly?”

“We only bother with border crossings that do not go to an acknowledged check point. Those are the only ones who may get up to something without our knowledge.” Pulling a small stack of reports out of her bottom desk drawer, she quietly murmured the spell to make copies and then handed the copies to Remus. Meeting his gaze, she smiled a sly little smile. “You know people who can use the Intel properly. Please use it to end this war as quickly as possible.”

“I will. Thank you...”

An uneasy feeling of impending disaster settled into Remus' stomach after his visit with Océane. Ever the fastidious rule minder, the motherly witch had bent a few rules for him in the past, but this time she had done something bordering on illegal by giving him the files he now carried shrunk in his pocket. The rest of her information had been just as disturbing as that one action.

Walking faster than usual, he pushed aside the pressing need to return home and made his way to the Department of Magical Law Enforcement. This visit might turn into a true trial if the twins had serious information for him.

“Senior Aurors Beauvais? You have a visitor,” a younger Auror announced after knocking quietly on their doorjamb. “He says his name is Remus Lupin.”

“Send him back, then! We’ve got a lot to discuss with the old man,” stated Remi Beauvais, the elder and darkest of the fraternal twins.

Etienne snorted gracelessly at his sibling and brushed his own blonde hair out of his face, ice blue eyes meeting Remi’s darkest, sapphire blue.

“Old man? How do you figure that? He’s four years our junior.” He looked over his shoulder at the Junior Auror. “Well, Facete? Go fetch our guest already!”

“Oh, sorry, sirs...” The Auror vanished on his errand.

“I see you two are still terrorizing the newer Aurors,” Remus teased. “How have you two been? Did you ever find a couple birds that were willing to put up with the pair of you?”

“Like that’s going to ever happen,” Remi grumbled. “Besides, it isn’t like we’ve had time to worry about it much, old friend. The climate is so hot in your neck of the woods that we’re feeling the heat here.”

“Madam Molyneux’s reporting on illegal Portkey and out of bounds apparition has kept us more than a bit on edge as well,” Etienne added. “Too much of the activity originates on or near the Isles to leave us feeling secure. We know in our guts that at least a good portion of it is linked to this Dark Lord, but we have no direct proof to take to our superiors.”

“They move fast.” Remi took over. “They’re in and out in no more than a few hours, and it’s usually much less time than that; we don’t have the manpower to respond to every ping.” He grinned wickedly.

“So, we asked Margaux and Océane to send you over once you crawled back out from under whatever rock you’ve been hiding under. Come with us. We have something really special to show you.”

“Okay...lead on,” Remus murmured and followed the light and dark twins further into the DMLE offices. “I hope you two aren’t going to get into trouble over showing me this stuff.”

“It is no trouble for us,” the blonde Auror stated. “We will just say you are a consultant from Britain like we do every time we bring you back here to talk shop.”

“Besides, it’s your second time fighting in a war against this same Dark Lord. I think that qualifies you as a consultant,” the brunette Auror observed. “Here we are. Visitors first,” he declared and urged the werewolf forward into the room with a playful shove.

“Hey, now!” Remus protested, then froze and stared around the room. Two walls were covered by large maps, and the third wall to his right held four smaller maps. He could see the constant changes going on within the borders of each map and the sight fascinated him. Moving towards the one directly in front of him, he frowned as dark red, green, blue and black dots appeared and then faded to a shadowed circle containing tiny coordinates.

“What is this? Are these portkey and apparition coordinates?”

“Very good, Mon ami! Yes, that is exactly what you are looking at. Red is Portkey, blue is apparition and black is unknown.” Grinning broadly at the look of disbelief on Remus’ face, Etienne patted the werewolf on the shoulder and ignored his glare. “Seriously, Remus. Black really does mean unknown.”

“How else would someone travel magically if not by Portkey or apparition?” Remus mused to himself more than anything, amber eyes bright with the fires of curiosity and determination. “What are these green dots that leave no coordinates behind?”

Remi chortled at that question, and grinned at his sulking twin with mischief in his eyes.

“That one took us ages to figure out and we all felt a bit like idiots once we finally did get it nailed down. What creature is mostly ignored unless something doesn’t get done, that also needs to travel without giving away the secret of its comings and goings?”

Watching the intermittent green activity and the way it tended to cluster in small, tight locations on the map, Remus frowned and considered the clue his friend had given him. So it doesn’t give away secrets, Remus mused and grinned wolfishly as comprehension filled his amber eyes.

“House Elves.”

“Damn, you’re quick! Great,” Etienne complimented. “And that leaves us with the unknown forms of magical travel. Some of them leave coordinates and some of them don’t. There are a few types and Margaux has been a great help with the set up of this mapping system. It shows current activity in the region. One of the smaller maps is a tally for incoming apparition, one for incoming Portkey, one each for outgoing of the same nature. The other wall size map is the full historical tracking of travel since we started this project six months ago.”

“Are you tracking your ‘visitors’ by their own magical signature or by the signature of the portkey? Can you tell if they used a different Portkey to return or if the one they had was created as a round trip?”

“Damn, Remus. You’re on a roll today, aren’t you, Loup?” Remi laughed good naturedly. “We track apparition by the magical signature, so we know if the same person leaves a distance away from their original arrival point. We track the actual Portkey itself since that is where the coordinates are stored. We can tell if a Portkey was roundtrip by the way the coordinates read on the map.”

“That’s good information to have, at least,” Remus mused quietly and drifted over to the historical tracking map. “Great Britain,” he murmured and the map shifted to show only the requested country. “Brilliant!” Studying it intently, he continued to close the view down until he was looking at each map quadrant individually.

Remi nudged Etienne and grinned wickedly. He arched an eyebrow when his brother shrugged and returned the grin.

"I knew he would be able to figure something out if we let him loose on this thing."

"Of course he will; this is personal for him," Etienne murmured. "This bastard killed his best friends." He sighed softly. "It is not fair that he should have to go through this same nightmare again. At least we only have to worry about it in a serious way if the Brits drop the ball."

"Don't be so sure of that, Mes Amis," Remus commented and pulled up two sections of the British map in particular, followed by the quadrants surrounding the perimeter of Paris' magical district. "There is a high degree of activity coming in and out of the London area and a heavy concentration coming into and out of Little Hangleton. From what little I have learned from my contacts during my travels, Little Hangleton is where You Know Who was reborn a little over a year ago. This may be the proof you need that he is already a problem for you. Little Hangleton is mostly Muggle, I believe. Who else would be using it as a magical base camp?"

"So we do have pinpointed Death Eater activity here in Paris," Etienne growled. "Thanks, Remus. Maybe now we can start heavier patrols on those areas."

"It does pinpoint the fact that there is activity, but it doesn't show if they're coming and going individually or as groups, or if one Death Eater comes in and portkeys out with a group of recruits...are you able to track that information through these spells you've got set up?"

"You're brilliant, Remus! We'll talk to Margaux and find out if we can get that kind of information out of the spell residue." Etienne kissed Remus soundly on both cheeks and beamed at him before laughing at the gobsmacked look on the younger man's face. "You Brits are so uptight! Live a little, Remus. Remi and I, we'll take you out and show you how the French party so we know you'll go home smiling."

Remi added his own quiet laughter to the mix and patted Remus on the shoulder.

“Don’t mind my mad man of a brother. I promise we won’t keep you out past your bedtime.”

“Prats. I can drink you both under the table and you know it,” Remus grumbled good naturedly.

“Yes, but we’ll make sure you have fun while you’re doing it,” Etienne clarified. “So, any more observations on our wonderful tracking system?”

“Um, yes, actually. Once you brought up house elves, I started thinking of other groups that might use alternative forms of magical travel.” Remus grinned. “Being a Defence Against the Dark Arts professor does have a few uses. In this case, check with the vampires if there are any willing to talk to you. They use a form of magic tied to the blood in their own bodies, I believe. It’s different from normal blood magic, so their travel spells may be one of your unknowns.”

“Wonderful. Any other ideas?”

“Not immediately, but I’ll owl you if anything comes to me while I’m away. This system is simply amazing, you two. Where did you get the idea? I’ve never seen anything like it.”

“Sure you have,” Remi stated. “You got us started when you told us how to make a map like the one you and your friends made in school. We just took the idea to our Research department and this is the end result.”

“So all of those questions you kept owling me with weren’t for personal mischief at all? You were picking my brain to build a security system?” Remus couldn’t resist the pleased grin that felt like it would split his face.

"Oh, we got into our fair share of personal mischief with the information you gave us, but most of it did go into this project," Etienne admitted reluctantly. "Are you proud of us?" he asked jokingly.

"Oh, Merlin, yes. This is brilliant." The werewolf just shook his head. "So, where are we going on this night on the town?"

July 17th, St. Mungo's, Office of Master Mind Healer Octavius Monroe

"I, uh, don't exactly know how to ask this." Ginny sighed expressively.

"Just say what's on your mind, Miss Weasley. There is no wrong way to phrase something." Healer Monroe grinned and qualified his statement. "Not while you're in this office, at least."

Smiling at his comment, Ginny nodded and smacked Hermione on the back of the head even as the older witch coughed to keep from laughing out loud.

"That helps a lot, actually, thanks. Hush, Hermione," she teased. "Um, why isn't all of this bothering me more? Everything I went through with Tom, it was just awful. He used me to hurt my friends...people I care about."

Considering what he knew from having shared memories with all five teens during their last several sessions, Healer Monroe gathered his thoughts before answering.

"To a degree, this answer may apply to all of you, but if you have specific questions, please ask," he began. "The memories were always present, but unavailable to your conscious mind, for the last several years. I believe your subconscious has been dealing with the trauma in subtle, quiet ways for the most part. Your nightmares were definitely not subtle, Ginny, but they were a lot more subtle than reliving everything the way we have been for the last week or so."

Healer Monroe looked each of the five teens in the eye and nodded encouragingly.

"I bet your nightmares and dreams make a lot more sense now than they used to."

"I used to have the weirdest dreams," Neville murmured. "Now I know I was dreaming about the night the Lestranges attacked my parents. Things are clearer." He frowned pensively. "I'd like to see if there is any more of the Obliviate that you can remove, Healer Monroe. It really seems to be helping my memory, if nothing else."

"I will do everything I can, Mr. Longbottom. Once we finish this discussion, I will give it another try if that suits everyone?" Receiving no negative responses, he nodded. "How about the rest of you? Miss Granger? Mr. Weasley? Miss Lovegood?"

"I just want to know how the Death Eaters were able to get into the Department of Mysteries and how we got in so easily," Hermione declared. "That has been bothering me since we walked into the atrium that night. Where was the security checkpoint guard? Where were the Aurors?"

"I have posted an inquiry into that very matter, Miss Granger. Our...the security of the Ministry must have been compromised from within. No other explanation makes any sense without completely defying logic." Healer Monroe hoped his almost mistake was overlooked by the inquisitive teens – there was no way he was going to get out of explaining what he had been about to say if Hermione pushed it.

"I'm just trying to get used to having this weird roadmap in my head," Ron murmured. "I never really understood consequences...cause and effect...before that Brain latched onto me. It's...it's so difficult to explain, but I have to explain it now because it will do more harm than good if I don't...you'll think I don't trust any of you when I do...I trust you all with my life, so I have to trust you with my thoughts, or part of them at least."

"We just want you to heal, Ron," Neville stated. "That's all any of us wants right now – to heal and be whole for the first time in longer than I care to think about."

"This other way of thinking is mostly blended in with my own now," Ron mused and nodded to acknowledge Neville's statement. "I see so many more moves ahead than I used to and it's a little scary to know even the slightest bit of what might happen if you do something major. It isn't always right up front. Most of the time, I can ignore it, but when a major event is coming up, my head hurts from all of the options, sometimes...does that make any sense at all?"

"Given how Chess teaches you to think, yes, it does make a bit of sense," Hermione commented. "One thing it means is our chances of beating you at the game are shot worse than before." She laughed quietly and then sobered. "It sounds like a gift that could very easily be seen as a curse. I bet you can't decide which it is sometimes."

"Most of the time, you mean," Ron quipped half heartedly.

July 17th, Romanian Longhorn Dragon Reservation

"It's about bloody time you were here for a visit," Charlie declared and smiled warmly at the potions master. "What have you been up to so far this summer besides rejoicing in the lack of children under your care?"

"I've been gathering potions ingredients for several delicate projects," Severus replied with a slight grimace. "I knew I would need a horn from one of your great beasts, so I made this my last stop."

"Ah, now the ulterior motive is brought to light," Charlie drawled in a direct imitation of his snarky companion. "I see how it is. So, how long can you stay? You look tired."

"I have a day or two at the most before I must return to my home and begin work," Severus replied, his lips twitching up into a brief smile over Charlie's antics. "There is also a meeting of the Order in less than a week and I'd like to be rested before having to deal with those imbeciles as well."

"Now, Severus, they're not all imbeciles," the Dragon Keeper pointed out with a grin. "If they were, they'd already be out of your hair courtesy of a Death Eater raid."

Nodding his grudging acceptance of his friend's observation, the Head of Slytherin grinned a little more.

"Don't you get enough danger here? Are you considering doing missions for the Order, too?"

Laughing outright at that, Charlie stopped walking and shook his head at the slightly older wizard.

"This danger I understand. I can predict what most of my dragons will do in any given situation. Now you, you go toe to toe with a far more dangerous breed, one I couldn't even begin to predict if I tried. How can you stand that kind of constant uncertainty?"

"I suppose that, like you, I know my dragons very well. They are both powerful and experienced, wily and temperamental. One day I may miscalculate a reaction and get stepped on or eaten, but until then, my expertise is desperately needed."

Silenced by that matter of fact explanation, Charlie sighed his exasperation and let the subject drop. It wouldn't serve any purpose to start a fight and the stubborn man wasn't going to stop spying because of something he said to him, anyway.

"What all did you have to collect for this 'delicate' project?"

"Fluxweed, fresh Re'em blood, a rare type of Black Hellebore and a horn from a Romanian Long Horn Dragon," Severus replied with a satisfied smile. "I arrived here late last night after leaving the eastern coast of America. I believe it was North Carolina, but I could be mistaken." Severus mused about his travels for a moment before shrugging. "Lovely place, really. Fluxweed grows wild there, and given the fact that I needed it picked during the dark moon, I chose to collect it personally. The cost to order it would have been outrageous."

"I thought Fluxweed needed to be collected at the Full moon, not the dark moon," Charlie observed. "I know you need it for Polyjuice potion."

“For temporary transformation potions, you are correct in thinking it would need to be collected during the full moon,” Severus replied, his tone full of pride for his friend’s memory of potions ingredients. “However, I needed this Fluxweed to have a quality of permanence, thus the requirement that it be gathered at the dark of the moon.”

Smiling under Severus’ approving gaze, Charlie nodded his understanding.

“I didn’t know that, but I’ll remember in case it ever comes up again. I guess you went to get it yourself because you didn’t want to chance that a black market supplier would send you the wrong kind just because they didn’t feel like collecting it properly,” he ventured.

“Exactly correct.” Taking in the sight of several new dragon enclosures, Severus arched an eyebrow. “How many new dragons have you added since I was here last?”

“Well, we got Norbert, a Norwegian Ridgeback, from Hagrid a few years ago and this is his new pen. He’s grown immensely since we got him as a hatchling. We’ve also gotten a dozen more dragons including a mated pair of Chinese Fireballs and a mature Hungarian Horntail bull.”

“You have been busy, I see. That explains the newer burn scars,” the Head of Slytherin mused. “Busy indeed. And you have the cheek to tease me about my dragons.” He shook his head, obsidian eyes full of amusement.

“Right, right. So? Where else did you go gallivanting off to?”

Recounting his trip to Greece for the Hellebore and his visit to mainland China for the Re’em blood, the spy fell into a far more relaxed and animated mode of interaction with his younger friend. Eyes bright with the passion he felt for his craft, he laughed at one point in his tale.

“An old acquaintance of mine lives in China and he owed me a while back about a business venture he was taking a chance on.

Apparently most countries have Re'em blood and parts on their restricted lists, making it quite difficult for potions makers and masters to obtain the ingredients they need to make a lot of the rarer potions. He sells directly to those he is acquainted with irregardless of what country you live in."

"And this is funny because...?" Charlie arched an eyebrow at Severus, his confusion clearly evident on his face.

"He invited me to stay for a day or two and I accepted. He spent every waking moment sending one or the other of his daughters my way with the intent that they should make me feel welcome..." Ears darkening under Charlie's now laughing gaze, Severus grumbled before continuing his story. He smirked. "I didn't have the heart to tell him that there was nothing appealing to me about a pair of 16 year old, barely pubescent girl children, let alone the fact that I have never found a woman to be attractive...If I had told him, he might have sent his son." He shuddered visibly. "Thank Merlin he didn't catch on..."

Charlie blinked at his friend for several long moments. He had often wondered if the snarky wizard was gay since he never seemed to show any interest in women, but he hadn't been curious enough to ask outright. With that question answered, the sight of the snarky Potions Master with such a disgusted expression on his face cracked him up yet again.

"What was wrong with his son?" he finally managed to ask.

"Nothing that I could see beyond the fact that he was a 14 year old prepubescent boy-child. Do you see the trend here, Charlie? The very thought of someone sending a child the age of my students to my bed..." Severus shuddered again. "Thank you, but no. I much prefer the company of adults."

"Poor Severus Snape, almost got married off to some little girl or boy in China. What would the world come to if you did tie the knot?" the red head shook his head and chuckled at Severus' sour look.

"I would be permanently scarred by the shock if anyone were to actually take notice of the event," Severus drawled caustically and

decided it was high time he changed the subject. "Have you seen signs of any Death Eater activity? I know this area is home to several werewolf packs of note and the Dark Lord has been hoping to recruit as many werewolves as possible."

"There hasn't been much, really. The Shadow Spires told us to go ahead and send any suspicious people their way," Charlie mused. "We did have a small group of six or eight wizards come through. It was a month or so back, I think. They were asking about the Shadow Spires, so we directed them on down to the village and they vanished."

"Hmm, funny thing, that. Do you think the werewolves killed them?"

"Not directly, no. The Pack Leader said they'd send the really persistent sorts like Death Eaters up the Spire to see the Count, the local vampire elder." Charlie shrugged gaelically. "The wolf packs and the vampires don't bother us Dragon Keepers, so I don't worry too much about anyone fool enough to climb that mountain looking for trouble."

Severus just arched one eyebrow expressively and nodded. He could all too easily appreciate the value of his friend's unexpected point of view.

"So...what else have you been doing out here in the wilds of Romania?"

July 17th, Ministry of Magic

Seated before a Pensive, Octavius Monroe methodically selected memories and drew them from his mind before placing the silvery strands in the magical bowl. An enchanted quill was poised in midair above a stack of parchment awaiting his command.

"Begin," he murmured and immersed himself in the memories he had recently shared with five young people during their counselling sessions. Recording his observations memory by memory, he notated some comments as being for the hospital's record only and some that would only be added to the files kept by the Unspeakables.

How did Rookwood manage to hang on for so long in the Unspeakables wearing that bastard's mark on his arm? We do random checks for that kind of thing...that's one more thing for me to look in to...

Making note to double check current procedures, he continued with his viewing while the quill at his side scratched out his notes rapidly. Exiting the Pensive over three hours later, he sat back in his chair and closed his eyes, hands rising to scrub at his face. Since beginning his sessions with the five teens that had followed Harry Potter into the Department of Mysteries, he had learned more about them than he would have normally expected to. What surprised him was how little they all seemed to say about The Boy Who Lived.

"What's the matter, Octavius? I haven't seen you burning this much midnight oil in years," Mina teased gently. "I'm going to run out of tea at the rate you're going." She cocked her head to one side and arched one fine, delicately arched brow. "It's those children again, isn't it."

Amused by the lack of question in the woman's last comment, Octavius chuckled and started to deny that there was a problem, but he knew her better than that; Mina would persist until he left in a huff or he broke down and told her what the problem was.

"N-Alright, yes, this whole situation smells bad and it's driving me crazy that all I seem to be able to do with this case is sit back and gather evidence for the eventuality that we actually get to nail someone for what they did to these teens." Octavius groaned and shook his head.

"There's a lot missing and Potter seems to be the key, but they don't talk about him beyond the occasional mention that he was the one who did this or that. Ronald Weasley passed on the information that Mr. Potter would come in once he was able, but I have no idea what that will be or why he can't just show up whenever he wants to..."

“Now, Octavius, you will find out what you are supposed to know in due time,” Mina stated, effectively derailing his rant. “Mr. Potter will show up when he is ready to do so and not a single moment sooner.”

“I know you’re right, but the longer this drags out, the greater the chance that they’ll all be Obliviated before I can manage to help them!”

Smiling affectionately, Mina shook her head at the Mind Healer’s fervour. As an Unspeakable and as a Mind Healer, he had always been dedicated and passionate about his work, but this case, this unique situation, had inspired him far beyond his usual involvement.

“You don’t really believe that will happen or you would have been pushing harder. Relax, Octavius. Let this mystery unravel itself for just a little while longer.”

Sighing heavily, Octavius nodded; she was correct and he knew it, but that didn’t mean he had to be happy about it.

July 17th, Hôtel Luxembourg, Paris, France

Waking slowly, Remus frowned at the annoyingly insistent tapping sound that grated on his nerves and aggravated his mild hangover. Who would be knocking now? He wondered. It was a great party...I’d be half dead if I wasn’t a werewolf...I KNOW those two insane Aurors are out like rocks. He’d gone out with a few French Ministry employees the previous night to properly celebrate his return home. Oh, how he loved visiting France...The tapping became – if possible – even more insistent and he finally realized what was making the infernal racket.

“Ruddy owl,” he growled and padded over to the window to let the huge black bird into his room and took the letter it offered with an imperious thrust of its leg. Remus shook his head and growled softly, his amber eyes flaring with a primal spark of pleasure when the imposing owl hopped back a bit and flared up defensively. The Wolf huffed its amusement.

“Thanks. Sorry to keep you waiting...”

If it were possible for an owl to snort, then this one did. It also screeched at him in a tone that made the slightly hung over werewolf moan softly and look around for something to feed the thing. Gaze lighting on his dinner plate from the night before, he offered it a chunk of steak and a tea cup of water.

“Water?” Remus sighed his relief when the meat vanished like magic and, after a little bit of the water, the large, dangerous looking bird flew out the window from whence it came.

“Thank bloody Merlin. Damnable owls...”

Shaking his head, Remus was finally able to focus on the letter the owl had just delivered. The Potter Seal was facing him from the back of the letter; just seeing that familiar seal pressed into wax - such a simple yet formal sight – and knowing that it had been done so many years ago broke his heart all over again. Flipping it over, he recognized her handwriting and drew in a shuddery breath. He obeyed the powerful compulsion to open the letter and her scent rushed up in an almost overwhelming wave.

“Lily...” he whispered, tears already tracking down his face as that one word declared the pain of his loss to an empty room. Unable to stand any longer, he sank down onto the side of the bed and started to read.

Dearest Remus,

If you are reading this, then the worst has come to pass and James and I are dead. I am so sorry, Remus. If it could have happened any other way, then I would have had it be so. It is time for you to remember your vows, brother of my heart. Please forgive me for the pain I have caused you and for what I had to do to protect my son.

Finishing the first paragraph unleashed the magic inside the letter and Remus’ head felt like it had exploded. Whimpering his pain, he slid from the bed to lie bonelessly on the floor as memories bombarded his mind and the darkness of oblivion rushed up to meet him.

Remus groaned softly and reluctantly opened his eyes to mere slits so he could look around his hotel room. The brightness told him it was still fairly early in the day, but hours after he had originally awakened and the hard surface beneath him let him know he had fallen to the floor at some point. The light stabbed at his eyes and he blinked rapidly, this pain a minor consideration compared to the gaping wounds he felt in his mind and heart.

“My Cub,” he whispered brokenly and slowly turned his head, only to flinch when his gaze fell on the letter that lay open beside him. It served as a blunt and unforgiving reminder of how he had been used by Dumbledore for over a decade, but worse still, it reminded him of the vow he had been kept from fulfilling. Freed of layer upon layer of trust and loyalty compulsions, he felt equal parts lighter and heavier as his Wolf’s rage flared in tandem with his own intense need to avenge the wrongs done to himself and his pack. Throwing his head back, he howled mournfully as grief washed away the rage for the time being.

Returning to his more rational, human senses after an unknown period of time, the werewolf finally took note of his surroundings and the letter that lay at his side. Picking it up with shaking hands, he shifted around into a more comfortable position.

“All your leashes are gone now, you manipulative old bastard.” He snarled silently and focused on the graceful handwriting of the long dead woman he had called Sister.

What we feared must have come to pass. Dumbledore convinced Sirius that he was too obvious a choice for Secret Keeper and honestly, he was, but Peter...shy, meek Peter...he betrayed us. I often wondered if Albus didn’t manoeuvre him into place like all the rest of his ‘pawns’. Very little would surprise me now.

You are my son’s Guardian Wolf, bound first by your intense devotion to his safety and then by the blood you shed to ensure that safety. He’s your Cub now, Remus. Go to him and keep him as safe as you can without smothering him. Make sure he has a good life. Merlin knows his life couldn’t have been easy if Albus got involved.

I don't know who else will still be alive by the time my boy turns 16, but seek out whoever of us has carried on. Find whoever is left and live.

Love always,

Your Sister,

Lily Marie Evans Potter

Shaking with grief once more, Remus cast several more privacy charms before collapsing into a foetal ball on the floor. Breathing in the scent that still lingered on Lily's letter, the once distant sense of loss lay open and bloody – all but two of his pack were dead and he finally gave way to it as wracking sobs shook his lean body.

July 18th, #4 Privet Drive

Moody observed Harry for the first part of his shift until the young wizard left the house for the back yard. He decided that now might be a good time to test out the boy's reflexes while he was busy doing something that would keep his mind occupied. He moved around the house to the back yard once the boy was situated and focused on his gardening.

Escaping to the back yard for some much needed sunshine and fresh air, Harry stripped off his over sized T-shirt and fetched the garden tools out of the shed. Losing himself in the simple pleasures of working his hands into the cool soil, pulling weeds and planting flowers, he smiled to himself.

Observing the young wizard for some time, the retired auror nodded his approval. It would seem that their warning to the Dursleys had born some fruit, at least. The boy had put on some weight and visible muscle just in the last few weeks and still seemed to move with the loose grace so typical of young athletes. Slowly stalking the young wizard, Mad-Eye moved closer, wand at the ready and a stupefy on his lips just waiting to be uttered.

Busily planting several packs of new flowers, hands nearly black from the damp soil, Harry raised a hand to wipe the sweat from his brow. He inhaled deeply and smelled the freshly turned earth, the water...and magic that was not his own.

Not questioning how he knew this, he simply let the subtle rustle of a cloak tell him where his target was standing before instinct had his arm drawn back. A sharp motion later and he heard the trowel 'thunk' into the wooden fence and the quiet cursing of a voice he knew only too well. A glance up showed the still vibrating garden tool to be quite solidly stuck in the fence.

"Hello, Moody. So sorry, thought you might have been a Death Eater."

"What's the meaning of all this ruckus out here, Boy? You better not have any of those freakish friends of yours out here with you!" Vernon blustered, face purple.

Harry looked over his shoulder at the much larger man and smiled coldly.

"If I do, you'll do nothing," Harry stated calmly. "Or do I need to remind you of why you'll do as I say and go back inside the house?"

Vernon paled noticeably and shook his head, eyes darting as he retreated back into the house without another word.

"Thank Merlin," the teen growled. "I'm glad you dodged that, by the way. That would have hurt if it had hit you, but it's like I always hear you say – Constant Vigilance and all that mess." Harry walked over and wrenched the trowel loose from the fence board. "Were you here to do something besides hex me?"

"You're quick as a bloody snake, just like Kingsley said," Mad-Eye muttered; the flare of something not very nice in the boy's eyes did not go unnoticed. "How did you know I was here?"

"I just knew you were there," he answered honestly enough. He wasn't quite sure of the mechanics of how he had known right this

moment himself. "I'm used to people attacking me. After a while, you can feel when someone is nearby, you can feel the intent to attack."

"I can't argue with that, boy, but who's been attacking you often enough to develop the kind of combat sense you have?"

"Dudley and his gang, Tom and his gang, Draco and his gang, my Aunt and Uncle at times, other students, Dementors, teachers...Need I go on?"

"Nooo, I think that about does it," Mad-Eye stated. "What did you do to the big fat muggle to make him shake in his shoes like that?"

Green eyes full of amusement, Harry stared at the space where the invisible auror was most likely standing and sneered in a frighteningly good imitation of Severus Snape.

"I haven't done anything to the Dursleys, Mad-Eye."

The only thing about that statement that bothered the retired auror was the dangling, unspoken 'yet'.

"See to it that you keep it that way, eh, Potter?"

"Sure, Mad-Eye."

July 18th, Severus Snape receives a letter from Lily Potter

Settling in to enjoy dinner with Charlie Weasley and the rest of the dragon handlers, Severus smirked at the younger man who had just made a jab about his resemblance to a large bat.

"My resemblance to a large, overgrown bat notwithstanding, I certainly never have any trouble keeping my students in line, so it must have some benefit."

Chuckling merrily, Charlie shook his head at the snarky potions professor. Though sarcastic, caustic and often outright vicious, then man was intensely loyal and Charlie never doubted his ability to count on him in a pinch.

“Too true, though their terror of you might have something to do with it. Don’t you think scaring little Firsties half to death is a bit in the way of overkill?” He nudged the older wizard playfully and sobered.

“You’re brewing something important. It has to be, what with everything you’ve collected.”

“It is very important,” Severus murmured for Charlie’s ears only. “So much so that getting it wrong could mean my death and getting it right could give us a window of opportunity against the Dark Lord.”

Charlie whistled softly, brown eyes worried.

“Nothing much riding on your shoulders, is there?” he sighed explosively. “Nothing much at all...”

Severus’ reply was interrupted by the arrival of a large Gringotts owl. His eyes followed the bird as it swooped in and landed on the table in front of him and offered its leg. He quickly untied the letter and went perfectly still when he saw the crest that was pressed into the sealing wax. Making no protest when the bird ate from his plate and drank from his goblet, he struggled to breathe through the indescribably powerful urge to tear the letter open and read it.

“Severus? What’s wrong?” Charlie didn’t like the ghostly paleness this unopened letter had reduced the older man to. “Isn’t that the Potter Crest?”

Severus jerked back to alertness at the sound of Charlie’s question, his black eyes a bit wild.

“Yes, it’s the Potter Crest,” he whispered. “I have to go...to my room...I’ll...I need to be alone...”

Following Severus out of the common room with his gaze, Charlie vowed to go check on him in an hour or two.

“That can’t have been good news...”

Locking his door behind him, Severus cast the first privacy charm he could think of before sitting down on the bed that was the Spartan room's main feature. Seeing how badly his hands were shaking, he took several deep breaths and slowly calmed himself to the point where he could open the letter with steady hands.

Severus,

If you are reading this, then James and I are dead and I can honestly assure you that you had no hand in the betrayal that took our lives. The bonds that we all shared would not allow it. It is time for you to remember the vows you spoke and sealed in blood, brother of my soul. Please forgive me for any pain I may have caused you to endure and for what I had to do to protect my son.

Darkness swallowed Severus' consciousness the moment he read the word 'son'. The magic that had obscured his memories of a ritual performed almost 15 years prior was undone by the charm that Lily Potter wove into the very parchment of her letter and with her charm came a number of spells that had been laid on top of it over the years. Swept clean by the power of blood magic, his mind began the process of emotional assimilation.

Severus woke to the painful racket of someone pounding on his door and calling out to him with audible concern. Recognizing Charlie's voice and knowing the persistent Dragon handler would not leave until he knew Severus was unharmed, he unlocked the door with a gesture and slowly sat up, head cradled in both hands.

"Please DO be quiet, Charlie. A herd of mad Hippogriffs has just trampled through my skull," he half hissed, half whispered.

"I heard you scream, Severus. What happened?" Charlie conjured a simple chair and sat down, gaze on the obviously miserable Potions Master. "It was a bad letter?"

"No, it isn't that it was a bad letter," Severus murmured quietly. "It simply reminded me of old vows and a duty I swore myself to 15 years ago."

Swallowing nervously, Charlie ventured a cautious question.

“Is it for You Know Who?”

“No, it’s not about the Dark Lord, not directly...and it’s definitely not for him.” Severus scrubbed his face with both hands and met the unflinching gaze of one of his few friends.

“Lily Potter asked something of me those many years ago and I will do everything in my power to see it through.”

“I thought you were on bad terms with the Potters.”

“Don’t believe everything you have been taught or told about that time, Charlie. Lily was like a sister to me. Now, I intend to rail at the gods for a while, so if you would be so kind as to leave me to it, I would be very grateful.”

Charlie nodded with a small grin. That sounded more like the Severus Snape that he had known for years.

“Alright, I’ll leave you to it, but if you need to talk, you know where I am, old friend. Do try not to hurt yourself, okay.”

“I’m already hurt enough,” Severus whispered, all the memories of how he had treated Harry so hatefully for the last five years tearing at him. Snarling soundlessly, he cast several more spells so he could throw his tantrum in peace, then let loose with a string of self-depreciating curses.

Calmer now, for the moment at least, the Potions Master sat back down on his bed and picked up Lily’s letter.

What we feared the most must have come to pass – we made Peter our Secret Keeper and he betrayed us. Whether he did so as a salve to his own weakness or at the outside urging of a manipulative old man, well, I’m sure I know the truth in death.

You are Harry’s Left Hand, his Mentor, bound first by the love I know you feel for him no matter how often you scoffed about it and then by

the blood you shed to protect him. Go to him, Severus. Help him learn how to survive in the world our follies have created. Help him learn to live. If Albus was involved in his life...his life has most surely been very harsh.

Seek out those of our number that remain. You'll need all the help you can get. After all, he is MY son.

Love always,

Your Sister,

Lily Marie Evans Potter

Collapsing onto the yielding surface of his narrow bed, Severus clutched the letter to his chest and cried out his loss, his grief and his pain. His anger would return later – for now, there was only the memory of the friends, the family, he had lost.

Translations:

Oc Dager – Goblin for Young Warrior

Sheklac – Goblin for Chieftain

Mon grand méchant loup– My big bad wolf

Vieux Loup– Old Wolf

Doux Merlin – Sweet Merlin

Bureau du Maintien de L'ordre Magique – Magical Law Enforcement Agency

Le Service des Créatures Magiques – Department of Magical Creatures

Le Service du Transport Magique – Department of Magical Transportation

“...I know your anger, I know your dreams

I've been everything you want to be...”

- Living Colour, ‘Cult of Personality’

July 19th, The Lovegood Residence

Humming quietly to herself, Luna watched her father work at his printing press and smiled her contentment. This was always the most peaceful time for her, a time when she could fully focus on the world around her.

“Have you heard anything on the Niblumper Migration or the Crumple-horn Snorkack lately, hmm, Daddy?”

“Nothing recently, Sweetheart. Have you heard anything?” Oddment Lovegood turned his focus to his daughter and sighed quietly. She was growing up to be so much like her mother and that scared him and reassured him at the same time. His Luna was a very special young lady.

“I haven’t heard anything good like that, no,” Luna replied. “It’s nice to have friends for once, though. This has been a really good summer.”

“You’ve been spending a lot of time with a couple of the Weasley’s right?”

“Ronald and Ginevra.” Smiling secretively, she nodded. “Hermione and Neville have been very nice companions as well. Hopefully Harry will be able to escape his awful relatives soon so he can come visit us.”

“How are things going with that Healer? You seem to be enjoying your visits with him. Is he a handsome young man?” Oddment grinned over his own wit and then laughed outright when his daughter threw him a disapproving glare. “Ah, so he is, eh? No wonder you girls...”

"He's your age, at least, Daddy. Don't be silly." Luna shook her head at her father and grinned over his antics. "I didn't really need a lot of help from Healer Monroe, not like the others. He does have a fascinating mind, however, so it's no surprise that he's an Unspeakable."

Coughing, Oddment stared at his daughter while his mind raced to catch up and process what Luna had just said.

"He's an Unspeakable...why?"

"We were in the Department of Mysteries, Daddy. It only makes sense that they'd have an Unspeakable work with us. They wouldn't want everyone else to know what we know."

"Do your friends know about his affiliations?"

"Not yet, but Hermione will figure it out soon enough. She's very smart."

"So I hear..." Shaking his head, Oddment grinned a little and sighed again. "Are his intentions focused on your best interests or is he mostly on a fact finding mission?"

"He's very concerned about what happens to all of us," Luna replied matter of factly. "I think he's more upset about some of the things that have happened to us than any of us are. Don't worry yourself about Healer Monroe, Daddy. He won't betray our confidences and he'll help us when he's able."

"Good. So, do you want to do any travelling this summer?"

"I think I'll pass on travelling this summer. Harry will be back with us soon, and that's when things are going to get really exciting. You may even have some really fun things to print for the paper here very soon."

"Oh, like what?" Oddment asked eagerly. He loved strange and unusual stories.

“Werewolf Tribes and a strange new snake species,” Luna breathed, her tone flat. “A pedestal has been shattered, never to be rebuilt...”

“Sweetheart? Luna? Can you hear me?” Oddment avoided touching his daughter until her eyes actually focused on him and brightened with a smile that faded almost immediately to a small frown.

“Did I go away again, Daddy?”

“Only for a moment, Sweetheart. You talked about werewolves and a new species of snake...and a broken pedestal. Do you have any idea what it means?”

“Not yet, but I’m sure to find out,” Luna mused quietly. “Can I bring my friends over if we need to be away from anyone who might be too nosy about what we’re doing?”

“Of course you can. The back room here at the shop is warded if that’s what you need.”

“Thanks so much, Daddy!” Luna hugged her father fiercely and bounced back with a grin. “This summer is going to be the best ever. I promise.”

July 19th, #4 Privet Drive

Harry glanced over at his Occlumency book and shook his head wearily, one hand dragging through his already unruly black locks and mussing them further. He had to beat this problem, this...fear he had developed. He had to, or his mental defences would never be strong enough. Thinking back on his last attempt at organizing his mind, the young wizard shuddered.

– Flashback –

Sinking into a deep trance, Harry looked around his Core and groaned. The mess was worse than ever thanks to his panicked flight of a few days prior.

“Time for some house cleaning,” he muttered under his breath and reached for a memory so he could toss it into the appropriate trunk. As soon as he touched it, he knew he was in trouble, but was yanked into the memory so quickly that he couldn’t escape it the way he had before.

Back in the memory as Tom, facing off against the bullies, he shook his head in denial.

“No, not this again...” he breathed, the sound more reminiscent of a whimper than words. He kicked and beat the oldest bully until there was blood coming out of his mouth and he had long since lost consciousness. Then his own mind betrayed him by superimposing images of Dudley and Piers over the bloody mass at his feet and finally the memory released its hold on his mind.

– End Flashback –

Panting, face in his hands, Harry groaned deep in his chest and shivered continuously for several long minutes. Bombarded by feelings of pleasure, triumph, pride, power and revulsion and struggling with the internal conflict evoked by remembering that scene again, Harry slowly calmed himself and realized he had absolutely no choice but to get his mind in order. He could afford no weaknesses and this was one very critical weakness that Albus and Tom would readily exploit if he gave them the slightest opportunity.

“Besides,” he mused to the empty room. “I may be able to use some of those memories to my advantage.”

Comforted by that very Slytherin piece of logic and sitting up straighter than he had in days, Harry descended back into jumbled mess of his own mind and started a much needed clean up.

Hours later, feeling immeasurably better for having faced his fears regarding Tom’s memories, Harry sat and ate the meal that Dobby had delivered for him. He frowned pensively as his thoughts wandered to issues that he hadn’t really wanted to consider before now.

Does it bother me that I want to hurt Dudley and Piers the way Tom hurt his attacker? I wouldn't really enjoy that. Would I? Did I enjoy causing them pain or was I just reacting to Tom's memory? Am I so certain that I couldn't possibly want to do that on my own?

Considering the myriad of compulsion charms and hereditary suppressors that he had been operating under, Harry felt a reasonable need to doubt and question the validity of the person everyone assumed him to be. Had any of his previous reactions been genuine or were they all programmed? Was Harry Potter as the wizarding world knew him nothing more than a clever illusion created and directed by a manipulative old puppet master?

Guess I'll have to find out when I'm around everyone again. I don't feel any differently about my friends; at least I don't think I do. I miss them all so much. Harry sighed. This was all so confusing and he wasn't very happy about the dark path his thoughts were taking him down. This could be partially caused by being a teenager...and the influence of Tom's memories couldn't be making it any easier.

He sighed again and frowned even more deeply, green eyes as dark as his current thoughts felt. Harry growled under his breath and looked around his small, begrudgingly offered room, its Spartan space deepening his feelings of anger and discontent. His expression abruptly relaxed from its fierce frown into a look of contemplative curiosity. Who am I? Who is Harry Potter? That is something I am going to have to find out very soon.

Grumbling to himself once more, he settled into finish his meal under the ever watchful gaze of his house elf. Letting his questions settle to the back of his mind where they could simmer for now, Harry smiled a little and relaxed visibly. He had too much to do before he would be able to walk out of this muggle hovel, so he would consider these concerns a little each day until he had them whittled away to nothing.

July 19th, Romanian Longhorn Dragon Preserve

"How are you feeling, Severus?" Charlie felt a sense of Deja-vu as he conjured a simple chair and sat down facing his friend, who had his head in his hands – again. "Headache?"

"If only it were so simple as to be a headache," Severus muttered wistfully. "No, this is the worst case of heartache...I need you to promise me you'll tell no one of the letter I received. There are others beside myself who would be in danger if you were to tell the wrong person..."

"Harry?" Charlie figured that was a safe first guess and from the look his snarky companion was giving him, he had guessed correctly. "I'll do one better, okay? I, Charlie Weasley, swear on my magic to reveal nothing of the letter that Severus Snape received from the Potters unless he personally tells me I can speak of it."

Stunned by the unexpected show of trust and loyalty, Severus nodded his appreciation and took a deep breath before speaking again.

"From you, a promise would have sufficed, but thank you for that. It means more than you could possibly know. Yes, Harry has a key part in all of this mess."

"I expected as much since you got a letter from the Potters. Will you tell me what this is really all about eventually?"

"Hopefully I will be able to tell you sooner than later. Be careful, Charlie. Be very careful who you trust, no matter how much you have always been told to trust them."

"I...I'll keep that in mind." This intense, focused and driven Severus was not the same man he was accustomed to seeing. The danger level was much higher with his friend right now and Charlie was inclined to taking his warnings seriously. "You have to leave tomorrow, don't you?"

"I'll be leaving by late morning, absolutely before noon tomorrow," the potions master confirmed with a sigh. "It might be a good idea for you to return to your family, Charlie. I'm afraid that this war is going to get ugly very soon."

"I'll keep that in mind, Severus. Be careful yourself."

July 20th, The Longbottom Estate

Augusta Longbottom stood at the back window of her parlour and observed the graceful confidence that was her grandson Neville. Amazed, she watched him, fascinated by the way he used his hands and magic to pot, re-pot and prune numerous delicate or dangerous varietals while summoning what he needed over his shoulder without so much as a glance. He knew where everything was and that assurance made his work look artistic to the much older woman.

“What has happened to my meek little Neville? Where has he gone?” she wondered, eyes tearing up briefly when, for the first time, she realized he was growing up. “You’re more like you father every day...” She contemplated when the changes had truly begun and realized that she might have to attribute the majority to the Mind Healer the teens were seeing. If this is definite evidence of that man’s skill in healing, then I’ll be making a substantial donation to his department. Nodding her head sharply as if to confirm her convictions on the matter, she sank into the chair at her side and continued to watch her grandson.

Humming to himself, Neville moved with the practiced ease of someone who knew his craft intimately well. Handling his plants like the precious possessions they were, he smiled and used his other precious possession to summon another small bag of specialized plant food. This new wand made him feel strong, the way everyone had been telling him the right wand should make him feel and he was grateful for the experience.

Moving from plant to plant, he laughed quietly and remembered the way his relatives had reacted to his new found – at the time – love of Herbology. Every Holiday that required a gift saw him with some new, strange, interesting or outright dangerous type of plant, resulting in the greenhouse he stood in now. He might not have a large amount of each plant, but his available variety nearly eclipsed Hogwarts’ greenhouses.

Deftly avoiding the bite of a Snapping Dragon when it darted in towards his hand, Neville directed the watering can over to soak the

plant's dry soil. Smiling as the cooling moisture relaxed the aggressive flower, Neville shook his head. I'll have to speak to Gran about this. The groundskeepers are neglecting my greenhouse. That thought made him frown fiercely and, seeing that he was done for the day, he strode out and closed the door securely behind him.

Arching one slender eyebrow at Neville's serious, almost angry expression, Augusta left her observatory post and called for tea and lunch to be brought in. Settling comfortably in her favourite wingback, she picked up her book. The absolute last thing she wanted was for Neville to feel nervous in his personal sanctuary and he might if he became aware of her observation.

Striding into his Grandmother's parlour with a great deal more confidence than he had evidenced the previous summer, Neville sat down across from her and sighed explosively.

"Whatever is the matter, Neville? You look fit to be tied," Augusta observed.

"The grounds keepers have been neglecting my greenhouse. Do you know why? Most of my plants are very delicate..."

Snorting quietly, Augusta shook her head at Neville and put her book down on the end table.

"They go in and do the absolute minimum because your plants try to eat them, darling. You are aware that there is a rather large Devil's Snare growing all over one wall, correct?"

"Of course I'm aware of it, Gran. I've been tracking its growth for nearly four years now, and that isn't the point. If they knew what they were doing..."

Startled by Neville's almost sarcastic response and his staunch position regarding the subject at hand, Augusta took a long look at the young man who was seated across from her before replying.

"They aren't trained to handle the kinds of plants you have in your green house, Neville. They are merely grounds keepers who deal

with the beautification of this estate, not Magical Herbalists, so if you want to see better care for your 'delicate' plants, you will have to provide it yourself."

Neville sighed more quietly this time and shook his head. It wasn't like he didn't have enough on his plate right now...The greenhouse is worth it. I'll handle it on the weekends, he mused.

"Alright, Gran, I guess you're right. I'm probably expecting too much from them. I'll arrange to come home one day a weekend so I can tend to the greenhouse myself."

"Good. Now that we have that issue settled, what else have you been doing with your time? You're spending a lot of time at St. Mungo's these days. Is it all with your parents or are you still keeping faith in that Mind Healer you were seeing?"

"Healer Monroe has managed to do more for me than any of the Healers I've been to in the past. We've managed to break down over half of the old Obliviate spell left over from when I was a toddler and my magic is improving daily for the effort." Neville smiled happily and transfigured his grandmother's book into a goblet and back again. "I couldn't manage that transfiguration at the end of the school year but I can do it now."

"So, he really is helping you, then. I was afraid to hope in case it was another futile attempt..." Augusta took a deep breath and slowly let it out. "You've grown up so much, Neville...you're more and more like your father everyday...he was useless at Herbology, but you're showing his knack for Defence. I don't want you to end up like your father..."

Startled by his grandmother's sudden melancholy descent into tears, Neville moved on impulse and knelt in front of her, his arms pulling her into a fiercely protective hug; murmuring to her, he sought to soothe her distress.

"I won't end up like Mum and Dad. I may not have enough power to take Bellatrix and Rodolphus Lestrangle out, but together, my friends

and I will make sure they don't have much chance to repeat the event with anyone else."

Slowly composing her self, Augusta hugged Neville then sat back and smoothed her clothes in what he had come to recognize as a nervous gesture.

"Why do you and your friends even have to face them? This is a war for adults, Neville...not for children..."

"We aren't children and we haven't been for a while now. We are the ones who will fight in this war. Do you see the adults doing much about You Know Who...about V-Voldemort? They haven't even faced Him as far as I know. Harry is going to fight and I'll fight beside him."

"But why, Neville? You're still so very young...Potter is a volatile and unpredictable young man...why would you risk your life to follow him into this war?"

"Because Harry has always believed in me; even when everyone else, including you, thought I was little better than a Squib, he encouraged me and worked with me until I could perform the Patronus charm and everything else I had to do to pass my Defence tests. I may not always agree with his decisions, but my support is the least I can give to repay his friendship and loyalty."

Neville fixed his grandmother with a firm stare and smiled a little to ease the seemingly harsh tone of his words.

"It was you who taught me the meaning of family honour, Gran. It was you who taught me that those members of the Noble and Ancient House of Longbottom that are able to fight have always sworn their wands to the leadership of the Lord of the Noble and Ancient House of Potter. Harry will be that Lord, Gran. In a lot of ways, he already is."

Eyes bright with unshed tears and a pride so large it made her chest hurt, Augusta Longbottom nodded her acceptance of Neville's declaration. When the time came, the Longbottoms would go to war with the Potters as they had done since the time of Gryffindor himself.

“Semper Fidelis ab Verum,” Augusta whispered with heartfelt emotion.

July 20th, Paris, France

Wandering through the streets of Muggle Paris, Remus Lupin walked with his head down and his shoulders hunched against a chill that only he could feel. Focused inwardly, he sorted through his memories and emotions and more than once was forced to wipe his face dry of tears as long buried grief rose up and threatened to overwhelm him.

He had no difficulty recognizing the memories that were uncovered by Lily’s blood-based Obliviate, but found himself becoming increasingly disturbed by the number of memories that didn’t match up with how he was certain things had actually happened. The realization that his mind had been tampered with after the death of his friends succeeded in burning away some of his self-pity and grief; the Wolf was angry, so he was angry and he knew who was to blame.

Focused by that certainty, he looked closer and did not like the remains of what had caged his mind. He recognized one of the spells in particular and turned back towards the magical district; cursing under his breath the whole time, Remus hated knowing that he had to play nice and docile for the Order of the Phoenix meeting or all would be lost. There would be no freeing his Cub from his muggle relatives if Albus realized that Remus was no longer his tame Wolf to call.

Sirius...James...Lily...I’ll take care of Harry with everything I have to give, he vowed, gaze on the stars. Rest peaceful knowing he’ll be safe now...as safe as he’ll let me keep him... Remus laughed roughly. He somehow doubted that Harry would be eager to be protected, but it was his job, and he would see it through to the best of his ability.

Steeling himself for the most difficult trial to come – leaving Dumbledore alive for the time being – he headed back towards the French Ministry and the distractions offered by the Beauvais twins’ tracking project. Once morning came, he’d decide when to head back to Grimmauld Place.

Hopefully Severus received a letter as well. Between the two of us, I don't know if Albus will actually survive the meeting...The more I think about it, the more I like the idea of biting him and leaving him to learn how to survive when no one will acknowledge they owe him a favour because he's a werewolf...

July 20th, #12 Grimmauld Place

Letting himself in at #12 Grimmauld Place like he owned the house, Albus took a few moments to centre himself before reaching out with his magic to find the most densely warded parts of the home. He was counting on the home at least having a minor ritual room that he could use to seclude Harry for his Maturity. After reviewing several of his monitoring devices, he was now firmly convinced that the boy had moved on to wandless casting. The bursts of magic his device had recorded – though relatively low in overall power – were too regular in strength and frequency of occurrence to be random.

He's breaking free and I cannot afford to lose my advantage, he muttered to himself and headed for the most intensely warded part of the house. Moving into the basement, he swore he could smell the Dark Magic in the very air around him; then he paused in front of a door sized slab of the purest black marble he had ever seen. Casting a lumos, he looked closer and saw the silver inclusions in the stone as well as the runes that were carved into the surface.

"Ritual room," he mused and started reading the inscription to find out how restrictive its access requirements were going to be. Prove your worth by blood as Black as this stone. Only those of the line Toujours pur may pass into the mysteries beyond.

Cursing to himself, Albus wrote off the ritual room. It did him no good to isolate the boy if he himself could not get to him to renew the block on Harry's core and the myriad of spells he had him under. He would have Nymphadora Tonks open the room at a later date just to find out what useful items might be hidden inside assuming, of course, that she was purely enough a Black to pull it off.

He moved on to the next most heavily warded room and discovered it to be the Library. Snorting derisively, the old wizard shook his head.

Well, I do suppose that it would be adequate torture for the young man to lock him in the library for his maturity. It would be far easier for me to keep him here, but no...it will have to be Hogwarts when the time comes. Then I can rebind his core and reinforce my directives without concern for interference.

Looking around the room, he nodded his satisfaction and decided that it would be a good idea to fetch the boy away from his muggle relatives on the twenty-fifth of the month in case his maturity decided to begin early. As it stood, he assumed that Harry would be more than eager to get away from Privet Drive. After my letter, oh yes, he'll be so grateful to get away from the Dursleys. I'll have Alastor or Nymphadora fetch him for me on the twenty-fifth, then. I'll move him to Hogwarts the day preceding his birthday.

Pleased with his machinations, Albus Dumbledore smiled and apparated back to his home to consider what move he would need to make next.

July 20th, The Burrow

"Did you guys notice anything unusual or out of place about the way healer Monroe answered our questions about how the Death Eaters got into the Department of Mysteries?" Hermione looked at Ron and Ginny, then on to Neville and Luna. She noted the blonde's secretive smile and wondered if it meant anything. Forget about it, she told herself. Luna smiles like that all the time.

"Uh, no, can't say as I did. Sorry, 'Mione." Ron shrugged and smiled apologetically. "What's bugging you about it?"

"I was off in my own little world at the time...sorry, Hermione." Neville looked sheepish and looked down when she grinned at him.

"What did you notice?" Luna's smile deepened. She was always so proud of Hermione when she figured things out with minimal clues or assistance.

"It was the way he changed what he was saying in mid-sentence," Hermione mused. "We asked how the Death Eaters got into the

Department of Mysteries and he got this look in his eyes, like he was personally offended by their presence down there...and he said 'our...the ministry's security' when I'm sure he meant to say 'our security must have been compromised from within'."

"You think Healer Monroe is an Unspeakable?" Neville blinked and then sat back with a curious look on his face while he thought it out.

"Why would he help us if he was an Unspeakable?" Ginny asked.

"Healer Monroe cares for his patients," Luna mused airily. "He is a truly gifted Mind Healer and he would do more to help us if he could, but this is not his fight. Not right now."

"But?" Hermione prompted. "I'm right, aren't I? He is an Unspeakable. How long have you known, Luna?"

"I didn't know or even suspect until he first joined me in my mind," Luna replied. "Once our minds touched, I knew both his fear for our safety and his own place as an Unspeakable."

"So, does this change anything?" Neville looked around the group with a serious look on his face. "I for one am going to go back as long as I'm making progress with the removal of the Obliviate. I don't think there is anyone else I would trust to do what he's doing in my mind."

"It's not like he could just come out and tell us he was an Unspeakable and it makes sense considering where we ran into trouble." Ron laughed a little. "I'm going back. How about you ladies?"

Three heads, one blonde, one red and one brown all nodded in agreement.

"We're finishing what we started."

July 21st , #4 Privet Drive

Looking up inquisitively when a soft sound alerted him to the arrival of his house elf, Harry smiled when he saw the heaped tray of steaming

food Dobby had bought for his dinner. Setting his book aside, he accepted the offering.

“This smells great, Dobby. Thanks. Can you stay and talk for a little while?”

“Of course, Master Harry, Dobby is happy to be staying. You needs to be eating though. Dobby will clean while you do.”

Chuckling quietly and wondering how he would have survived this summer after losing Sirius if it hadn't been for Dobby and his friends, Harry dutifully began to eat and watch his little friend scurry around tidying up the little room.

“I'm sorry there isn't much for you to do, Dobby. Once I have a home of my own, it won't be so bad.”

Dobby beamed happily and bounced over to sit on the floor near his favourite wizard.

“Dobby finds much to do at Hogwarts for now, Master Harry.” The elf studied his master more closely for several long moments, his large eyes widening further over what he saw. “You is growing stronger. Dobby feels the way yous magic is changing. Soon Master will have magical changes that everyone can see.”

“Is that normal?” Harry asked this cautiously, face full of worry that this might be one more freakish thing about him.

Dobby nodded vigorously, eyes happy.

“Oh yes, Master Harry. All witches and wizards grows up magically,” he reassured the young wizard. “Some are stronger than others, but all have it.”

“Well, that's a relief. I'll drag that book out that you found for me. I'd kind of like to know what to expect.”

“Dobby is getting it for you while you finish yous dinner.”

“You’re the best Dobby.”

July 21st , #12 Grimmauld Place

Restless and perfectly, miserably certain of the cause, Severus kept himself firmly ensconced in his shadowed corner and observed the rest of the Order members. No one would deliberately interact with him anyway, and he was perfectly happy to keep it that way. Albus moved to stand and he barely suppressed a bored sigh. The meeting hadn’t even begun and he couldn’t wait to get out of the room and away from the manipulative old man that had ruined so many lives.

Unnoticed thanks mostly to his quietly submissive façade, Remus echoed Severus’ observation of the gathered Witches and Wizards and automatically classified them as threat or prey depending on how the Wolf responded to them. Focusing on a fellow predator, he was surprised by the spy’s unusually agitated behaviour. Why so nervous, Severus? I haven’t seen you like this in so many years...is this about Harry, perhaps? The alpha werewolf willed the former Death Eater to look at him, to meet his gaze.

Aware of an intensely focused stare, Severus looked around lazily and met Remus’ bright amber gaze. The pure strength of will the other usually kept so well hidden hit him like a freight train and his eyes widened briefly, a look of uncertainty crossing his usually stoic features before they settled back into his preferred mask. Folding his robes around himself, he shivered imperceptibly and tried to hide himself further in his corner. He was painfully nervous about how Harry would receive his news and apologies once he had the chance to speak to him and wanted only to be able to focus on something, anything else until this damn meeting was over. Jerking his gaze from the werewolf’s, he cursed under his breath.

Startled by the mixture of fear, self loathing and sick nervousness that filled the Slytherin’s obsidian eyes, Remus blinked and sat back to consider a way to ease the coming confrontation. Harry was likely to be angry and resentful when faced with the snarky Potions Master and he wasn’t sure if there was any way to make this transition easier for Severus and his Cub.

Looking at his gathered flock with a benevolent smile, Albus rapped on the table with his knuckles.

“Let’s get started, everyone. Severus, do you have any news for us? Voldemort has been especially quiet since the events at the Ministry.”

Taking a moment to regain his composure, robes held protectively close to cover for his nervous lack of attention, Severus groaned to himself. Shifting reluctantly out of his shadowed corner so the other Order members could see his face, he sneered at those who flinched when Albus had said ‘Voldemort’.

“I was called once a few weeks ago. The Dark Lord ordered me to brew several restorative potions for him and I have been gathering the necessary ingredients, many of which are rare and quite illegal.” He smirked maliciously. “I will have to deliver the potions to him soon, so the next two weeks are going to be busy ones in my potions lab.”

“Two weeks?” Mad-Eye asked his tone openly sceptical. “What the bloody hell are you brewing?”

“Recreo Primaevus and Expurgo Corporeus.” Severus smiled nastily. “You do know what those are, don’t you, Moody.”

“Merlin’s Balls, Albus...” Moody sputtered.

“Yes, these potions should work to restore a proper human face and body to Voldemort, but the Expurgo may well undo many of the dark ritual effects, thus weakening him. Alert us when you have delivered the potions, Severus. Then we can plan an attack.” Albus smiled beatifically.

“It is also my belief that Voldemort was injured by his failed attempt to possess Harry. Our young Mr. Potter is always full of surprises,” he stated pompously. “Remus, what can you tell us of your fellow werewolves?”

“There is little to tell, Albus,” Remus commented quietly. “The newest laws that have been passed by the Wizengamot are certainly not geared to promote good will between any of the magical creatures

and Wizarding kind. The general consensus is to avoid the conflict entirely, but some will side with Voldemort simply for the perceived chance at revenge.”

Moody watched Remus intently, natural eye widening a little when he saw just how dangerously angry the werewolf was about the topic at hand. It didn’t surprise him all that much that no one else seemed to notice – no one ever noticed Remus, himself included up to that moment.

“Does anyone have anything else to add?” Albus looked around the room with his twinkling blue eyes and smiled encouragingly. The rest of the meeting offered up little in the way of useful information and Albus called an end to it less than an hour after it had begun.

“Very well, everyone. As we have nothing further to discuss, we shall adjourn. Thank you all for your time and your strength in these dark times.”

Approaching Severus just outside the doorway of the kitchen once Remus had wandered out, most likely on his way to his bedroom, Albus smiled encouragingly at the younger wizard and cast a security charm around them.

“That didn’t look like a pleasant exchange you had with Remus prior to the start of the meeting, Severus, my boy. I hope there isn’t any more of a problem between yourself and Remus than there usually is. You do have to work together, you know.” Albus’ curiosity and self-preserved instincts had kicked in strongly when he saw the two enemies staring each other down during the moments just prior to the start of the meeting.

“I know, and I do try to be civil, Albus.” Severus grumbled unhappily and let his own unsettled emotions guide him. “Nothing either of us can think to say will ever make up for what almost happened between us and you know it.” He sighed tiredly. “I think the damnable wolf was simply warning me off of his ‘Cub’, or some other animal idiocy.” Severus sneered with his usual malicious venom.

"It's just more of his typical werewolf 'growl and posture' routine and I've become quite accustomed to ignoring it. Why you insist on keeping him around, I will never understand..."

"One does what one must to achieve a goal, my boy," Albus admitted, gaze shuttered and nearly devoid of its usual merry twinkle. "We are at war and these children seem bent upon fighting it behind our backs. The very least I can do is make sure they are capable of fighting at his side..."

"His?"

"Come now, Severus, don't play games with me. Harry is the rallying point for the young people in this war and he is training them himself. They did very well in their little club last year, don't you think." Albus smiled, his twinkle returning with a fierceness that the Potions Master had rarely ever seen.

"You've seen the fierce fighter he can be when he puts his mind to it, my boy."

"How can you think that brat..?" Outwardly, Severus looked scandalized and as put out as he usually might, but inside he felt ill. He had trusted this man for most of his life and now, oh how the mighty have fallen.

"If Potter is your idea of a war leader, then we might as well all lie down and die! That incompetent little brat couldn't fight his way out of a paper bag unless someone gave him detailed instructions!"

"Severus," the elderly wizard chided, tone edged with ice. "You know better than that."

The potions master sighed in exasperation and shook his head, obsidian eyes full of fire.

"The boy has proven little to me. I have seen no definitive proof. You, however, have faith in his strengths, and it appears that will have to be enough for now."

Seemingly satisfied with the hateful man's response, Albus nodded and patted Severus on the shoulder with a grandfatherly smile and a nearly blinding twinkle.

"Remind yourself to keep thinking that way, my boy, and everything will turn out just fine." He cancelled the security charm and nodded to Severus before heading out the door.

Mad-Eye shook his head once Albus and the others were gone; limping to the foyer, he called out the werewolf's name to stop him before he could finish his retreat upstairs to his room.

"Lupin. A word please."

Turning reluctantly from his perusal of a certain Slytherin and thoughts of how to get him upstairs so they could speak freely, Remus shot one last look at the potions master and then headed back down the stairs so he could speak with the retired Auror. He felt the privacy spell go up and growled his irritation. For once, he wished that Albus and Moody weren't so damned paranoid. It would have been much easier if he and Severus could have each eavesdropped on the others conversations tonight.

"What can I do for you, Moody?"

"You can go check on Potter for me," Mad-Eye stated gruffly. "He's certainly proved to me that he knows the meaning of 'Constant Vigilance'."

"What happened, Moody?" Remus asked his voice full of a deadly intent. He advanced on the retired Auror and held back the urge to growl audibly. "What did you do to my Cub?"

"I just meant to test him every so often, to stun him at the worst," Mad-Eye explained his expression reminiscent of someone who had just eaten a particularly sour lemon.

"Potter knew I was there, Lupin. I was under an invisibility cloak and he still nearly impaled me with one of his bloody muggle garden tools!"

He threw it at me hard enough to stick it in the fence like a bloody throwing knife!"

Snickering behind his hand, Remus' shoulders shook with the first real laughter he'd expressed since Sirius' death.

"So, you mean to tell me that my fifteen year old Cub got one over on you, the great 'Mad-Eye' Moody? You must be joking..."

"That boy has reflexes like yours must've been at that age, Lupin. He's quick as a bloody viper once he decides to strike and just as dangerous. Go talk to him. He'll listen to you." Moody shrugged to loosen his shoulders. Lupin wasn't acting like the usual lap dog that he appeared to be and he had just been forced to upgrade him from 'only dangerous a few days a month' to 'dangerous all the time, with some days being worse than others'.

"Those muggles are terrified of him and it isn't on account of us warning them off. He's doing wandless magic every day. I've seen him."

"Really now. A little wandless magic isn't something to be surprised about. He did perform a Corporeal Patronus at thirteen," Remus pointed out. "You think...what exactly are you implying, Moody?"

"I'm just saying the boy has abnormally high reflexes...inhumanly high, and I know what good seeker reflexes look like so spare me that drivel. He could hurt someone if he wasn't so damn careful." The retired Auror met the werewolf's amber gaze and fought down the urge to react defensively towards the predator he saw looking out at him. "He pushes himself every day, Lupin...every day that I have been there early, he's worked himself for no less than five hours a day on wandless magic. Eats like a bloody horse, too."

Now Moody had Remus' complete attention; between mention of the prolonged use of wandless magic and the heavily increased appetite, he was certain that Harry was already in the early stages of his Maturity.

“How much is he eating, anyway? Are you telling me the Dursleys are feeding him?”

“He’s always eating something. It’s a constant thing – when he isn’t casting, he’s eating, and yes, they are definitely feeding him. He’s gained muscle and some body weight in the last few weeks alone.”

Remus doubted that the muscle and growth had anything to do with food, but he would humour the old Auror for now. He nodded, his expression thoughtful even as he jumped for joy inside. The first signs of awakening were often physical, so this was a very good bit of news, even if it did mean that Harry’s body had been gearing up for his maturity a full month or more prior to the actual event.

“I’ll go talk to him, Moody, but I’m not sure what good it will do...”

Taking into account all of his observations of the last hour and a half, Moody came to an unlikely – in his mind – conclusion and decided to throw out the bait and see which one of the two men took it. He hadn’t, however, expected to get two sharks with one hook. Dropping the privacy charm, he glanced over at Severus, then back to Remus.

“You’re a good man, Lupin. So, when will you two be taking Potter from the muggle house?” Moody arched an eyebrow and resisted the very real urge to back away when Remus drew himself up to his full height and let the final remnants of that deceptive façade vanish completely. In place of the worn and broken down werewolf stood a powerful and vital young man, the grey in his hair serving only to add interest instead of age.

Severus forced himself to relax as Remus turned all dominant werewolf on Moody. This was a side of Remus he hadn’t seen in close to fifteen years and it served as a further reminder of everything he had pledged to Harry all those years ago. He growled under his breath and shook his head at the retired Auror before commenting.

“Don’t worry about it, Moody. Potter will be safe and so will those...muggles he lives with.”

"I don't go back on shift for two days," Moody commented, his nonchalant tone obviously forced as he looked from Severus to Remus and back. Both men were formidable duellers and the werewolf was especially dangerous when he allowed the gloves to come off and the retired Auror had no desire to test the odds of his winning a fight against their combined ability. "Make sure you can fool Albus' tracking devices until then." With that last comment, he was gone.

"What exactly did he want?" Severus asked once they were alone in the foyer. "I was only able to catch your side since you were facing me and I could lip read what you were saying."

"He's very concerned about Harry," Remus replied. "Apparently he tried to sneak up on the Cub and nearly got himself impaled by a thrown garden tool...while he was invisible." He chuckled wickedly. "Moody compared Harry's reflexes to mine and a striking viper."

"Sweet Merlin," Severus breathed. He felt the renewed intensity of Remus' gaze again and looked up at him with a curious expression.

"I presume you were staring at me for a particular reason, Moony?"

"I see you received a special delivery as well." Remus grinned at the momentarily confused Head of Slytherin. "You wouldn't have called me Moony otherwise."

"Indeed," Severus drawled and shook his head, a sneer curling his lip reflexively. "We have to get Harry out of that muggle...hell."

"His birthday is only a little over a week away, so I agree that we don't have long." Remus shifted nervously, as if responding to some deeper worry. "If...even if that ritual only did exactly what Lily intended, his magical coming of age could be...bloody hell, I don't know..."

"I don't know how much damage it would do to a muggle home, either," Severus muttered darkly. "I'm not weak by any stretch, but neither am I in the truly exceptional range and my maturity tore my

room and part of the hall in a warded home to hell and back.” He sighed.

“Given how badly Harry has been treated by his so called relatives, he may not feel a desire to even attempt to shield them from harm. We’ll have to discuss it further once we have a chance to get to him. This close, we should already be able to get some sense of what to expect.” Sneering at Molly Weasley when she eyed the pair of them inquisitively, he returned his attention to Remus.

“My Manor is securely warded and has an even more heavily warded ritual room that should suit our purposes well.”

Remus sighed heavily, the slump of his shoulders and sudden aging of his appearance far more telling of his mood than any words could ever be.

“We need to go talk to Harry.” He straightened, looking noticeably younger and stronger as his gaze filled with an unstoppable resolve. “What did Albus want when he pulled you aside a little bit ago?”

“He was inquiring as to the nature of our disagreement. Apparently he noticed our little staring match before the meeting.” Severus replied and recalled the conversation in detail even as his skin grew chilled. “Harry is going to hate me, Remus...I just know it. I’ve been awful to him...”

July 21st , #4 Privet Drive

Apparating in several blocks from their destination, both men transfigured their clothing into muggle attire. Remus glanced over at his companion and blinked in open surprise.

“You know muggle clothing that well?”

“I am quite fond of denim and T-shirts, Moony. Don’t look so surprised,” Severus taunted playfully. “Now, which of these dreadful houses is the correct one?”

Sighing, Remus led the way, mind still marvelling over the idea and image of Severus Snape in black jeans and a black T-shirt.

“You just seem too...conservative for muggle clothing.”

“Conservative?” Severus snorted gracelessly. “Don’t judge the book by the cover, Wolf.”

“Of course,” Remus mused, amber eyes full of amusement. “And you wear black leather under your teaching robes, right?”

“Silk, actually. It’s not as warm as leather.” Severus smirked when Remus nearly tripped. “Problem, Moony?”

“No, no problem at all,” the werewolf replied. “Who ever you finally settle down with is going to have a hell of a time once they catch you.”

“What are you going on about?”

“Well, you will settle down, eventually, right?”

“I can’t say as I’ve thought about it. I’m not likely to survive the war. Why would I think about it?” Severus stopped and glared at Remus. He wasn’t sure if this was a normal curiosity for his companion of old or not, but the topic of discussion was making him quite nervous and he didn’t need anything else making him feel jumpier than he already did. “What brought on this strange conversation?”

“I don’t know. It just...came up, I guess. Sorry.” Remus shrugged and continued on toward number four Privet Drive. “It’s just...Well, you smell lonely almost all of the time, so I figured you must think about the future an awful lot.”

Walking once more, Severus caught up to the werewolf easily and avoided answering by throwing it back at him.

“Do you think about it?”

“Every time I’m around Tonks I can’t help but think about it,” Remus said with a self depreciating smile. “I always seem to want what I can’t have, though, so I try not to.”

Severus let the conversation lapse into silence because he didn’t know what to say to that declaration and he certainly wasn’t about to admit just how heavily his own loneliness weighed on him.

Hearing a solid knock on the front door, Harry discreetly checked to see who it was. He grinned when he saw Remus turn to look and wave at him. Bounding downstairs, he actually beat his Uncle Vernon to the door and had it open before the much larger man could get there to stop him.

“Remus!” Suddenly he paused, eyes narrowing suspiciously when he caught sight of the other man who stood with him. “Tell me something only you and I would know, Remus. Then you can tell me why the bloody hell you brought Snape.”

“I taught you the Patronus charm your third year,” Remus mused, then brightened in an attempt to ignore Harry’s hostile tone and scent. “Pronglet or Prongs, Jr...those were Sirius’ nicknames for you.”

Nodding his satisfaction with Remus’ immediate answer, Harry smiled a greeting to the werewolf and then focused on Severus with his previous intensity.

“Now...”

“Boy! What is the meaning of this?!” Vernon blustered, only to freeze when the teen in question turned to glare over his shoulder, green eyes filled with a very visible threat. “Just be quick about it!” he declared and beat a hasty retreat.

“James Potter saved my life when Sirius Black tried to set Remus on me in his werewolf form,” Severus replied quietly. “You looked at one of my childhood memories in my Pensive when I left our last session because Albus called me away.”

"C'mon in," Harry stated abruptly and led the way up to his room, his hardened green gaze drawn back to Severus repeatedly once they were safely in his room. "It's not that I mind company, but what's going on, Remus? Why the bloody hell did you bring him here with you?" Ignoring the potions master's flinch for now and his curiosity over what had caused the defensive reaction, Harry focused on finding out what was going on and he was just about to the point where he would be willing to beat it out of the two men if he had to.

"I brought Severus with me because we both have a lot we need to talk to you about," Remus began and ignored the teen's narrowed eyes when he used the spy's given name with such easy familiarity. "Many things are not what they appear. You know that from your own experiences, Cub..."

"I know from my own experiences that he," Harry snarled and glared at the Slytherin in question. "Is a nasty, cruel bastard who doesn't deserve the privilege of teaching anyone, let alone impressionable young children. My worst memories of Hogwarts come almost exclusively from my contact with this one man and those damn excuses for mind rape that Dumbledore called Occlumency lessons."

Severus flinched visibly, as if the words had landed a physical blow, and the pain they caused was increased for them having been true. Fighting for composure even though his first instinct was to just go ahead and break down, he turned his head away from Harry and tried to get his breathing back under control.

Seeing the way his companion was hunched in on himself, something he had never before witnessed from the wily, hardened spy, Remus jumped in before Harry could rip into Severus and pursue his attack with renewed venom.

"He was under compulsions, Harry!" Remus snapped out, amber eyes full of his own pain. "He wasn't himself then...no more so than I have been my complete self for the last 14 years...now sit down and listen for a few minutes, dammit!"

"Why should I believe that Dumbledore's man would need to be under compulsions to break me into little pieces that would be easier

for the old man to use? That's all they did to me the entire time I was at Hogwarts! They did their damndest to break me and they fucking failed! Maybe now I'll finally get to return the favour."

"I deserve that," Severus whispered in a voice roughened by emotion. "I deserve that and more for hurting you when I swore to protect you..." Hugging himself protectively, he shook his head. "Albus turned my love for a child into the worst kind of jealous hate I have ever experienced...no matter how much I tried to help, it always came out wrong..."

Words would never have impacted on Harry, not when it came to Severus Snape. The man was a Slytherin through and through and that meant that he could say whatever needed to be said and he would never give his enemy a shred of information that could be used against him. What stopped Harry in his tracks was the sight of tears tracking down the older man's face. Gobsnacked, he sat down on his bed and just stared for the longest time as Severus seemed to curl into himself and let the tears fall unheeded from his openly broken eyes.

Mouth working soundlessly, Harry's anger rapidly drained away to a more rational level. Thought returned and he blinked out of his almost trance like observation of the other man.

"Tell me what happened and I'll decide what to believe when you're done," he whispered, gaze focused entirely on Severus for now.

"About a week ago we both received letters from Lily," Severus began tentatively. "Personally, I've been assimilating the memories her reversal charm released and getting my temper back under control..."

"I spent several days torn between raging about Albus and grieving for my dearest friends all over again," Remus interjected when Severus seemed unable to continue. "A little over a month before your first birthday, Albus brought your mother a book on blood rituals and showed her the one he thought she should use to protect you. Lily went over the ritual on her own, and through her own knowledge and a lot of research, decided that it was not what it appeared to be.

That ritual would have used the three of you as sacrifices designed to kill Voldemort when he attacked you.”

Remus drew in a deep breath to compose him self, then forged on ahead. There was no simple way to explain everything, not with someone as angry and resentful as Harry seemed to be. “The night of your first birthday, your mother enlisted my self, Sirius, and Severus to help her and James with a blood ritual to help protect you from Voldemort’s impending attack. Once we had completed the ritual, Lily performed a blood based memory charm that I’m sure few would know how to reverse. She used it to hide what we had done from Albus and Voldemort so that none of us could be forced to give up the information.”

“I don’t know what other charms had been cast on my self or Remus, but up until the time when her letter caused the removal of her work and everything that had been layered on top of it, I truly believed I hated you and the Marauders,” Severus murmured. “With the charms gone, I find myself uncertain of how to approach you...All I can do is start with an apology because I am more sorry for how I treated you than I will ever be able to express or atone for... I would never have hurt you of my own free will...” He trailed off, clearly still in a state of emotional turmoil despite his Slytherin mask.

“Severus carried you around the house like you were his baby,” Remus whispered loud enough for both to hear. “Lily had to come get you from him half the time. Hell, she had to put her foot down and keep you to herself when Severus and Sirius were in the house at the same time. They nearly came to blows a few times over who would get to hold you and when...they even started a few duels over it as I recall...” He grinned at the blushing spy. “We didn’t all get along spiffing all the time, Harry...but we did respect each other, Severus and the Marauders, that is. Sometimes the five of us were quite cruel. Sometimes we were just having fun...”

“Sirius’ so called prank involving Moony was the bone of contention that nearly split the Marauders up and nearly made me hate them for true.” Severus sighed. “We came here, Harry, because this house may not stand up to your maturity. It’s going to be strong. I can feel

that now, from just sitting here in the room with you and its still ten days away.”

Meeting the younger man’s Avada Kedavra green gaze cautiously, as if their focus might kill him just as easily as the spell could, he relaxed a little and continued. “I have a Manor with strong wards and an even more strongly warded ritual room.” He sat forward. “Let us take you to Snape Manor. You can study all you want there and neither Albus nor the Dark Lord will be able to find you. It’s under Fidelius and I am my own secret keeper. Please allow me the chance to make up for our past and to show you how important you are to me.”

“So, you and Remus will be there with me, right?”

“Someone has to teach you how to duel and bring your potions skills up to measure,” Severus grumbled. “Of course we’ll be there with you, brat.”

“Ah, there’s the Professor Snape I’m used to. You were starting to worry me for a minute or three.” Harry smiled a little despite the anger flashing in the depths of his eyes like a fire that had not been banked very well. “That manipulative old bastard has taken more of my life from me than he can ever give back,” he growled.

“I have a lot to think about before I can even begin to stop being insanely angry about a lot of the things that have been done to me and the people I care about, but I am willing to give you the chance to prove your claims...both of you. As for potions, well, I may very well surprise you when it comes to that. It helps to have the Ingredient Interactions table memorized.”

“You didn’t?” Severus frowned. “Why ever not?”

“Muggle raised,” Harry stated in reply. “And by these muggles no less. Remember?”

“Oh...yes, well, we’ll see if memorizing the chart has helped your skills any. It seems that your upbringing was a fact that I kept forgetting...” Severus agreed grudgingly then shook his head. “We

need a window of time where Albus won't be alerted that you're missing."

"So my magical signature needs to still be here even though I won't be anywhere in the area?"

"Yes, exactly. What are you thinking, Cub?" Remus arched an eyebrow at the look in the teen's eyes. "Moody doesn't come back for two more days and he told us that Albus definitely does have magical devices that would alert him if you were gone."

Harry grinned at the nickname and then chuckled when Dobby chose that moment to appear.

Dobby popped in abruptly and squeaked when he saw Remus and Severus. Handing Harry a book he'd 'borrowed' from the Malfoy library, he shifted nervously.

"Would yous be wanting dessert and tea for three, Harry Potter, sir?"

"That sounds perfect, Dobby. Oh, thanks for the book. Is this the one Neville said I could borrow?"

"Oh, no, Harry Potter, sir. My old Master's library is full of such books. This one is being much better than the one Dobby was finding before. Dobby borrowed." The elf vanished after finishing his explanation.

"He stole a book from Lucius Malfoy for me..." Laughter bubbled up and Harry let it out briefly, then remembered he wasn't alone and sobered abruptly. "Um, sorry..."

"You bonded...oh, Merlin help us..." Severus shook his head, eyes widening when he caught sight of the book's title. "Magical Inheritance by Bloodline? What are you expecting to have happen to you?"

"Dobby and Luna both insist I'm about to go through a magical awakening or maturity or something. I started reading the one he got for me before, but apparently he decided it wasn't good enough, thus his little bit of larceny." Harry grinned crookedly. "I don't personally

know what to expect, but as crazy as I've been feeling and what with the way I've been eating..."

"Yous favourite tarts," Dobby stated and set a plate full of tarts in front of Harry before depositing a smaller helping in front of the two adults that was clearly meant to be shared between them. "Is there being anything else Dobby can do for you, Harry Potter, sir?"

"Yes, there is. I have a question, Dobby."

"Yes, Harry Potter, sir?"

"You did magic and made it register as if it was my own a few years ago, right?"

"Only to protect the great Harry Potter..." Dobby looked suitably remorseful on the outside, but his eyes held no regret.

"What if I needed you to pretend to be me, or my magical signature, at least...could you do that?"

"For a short while, yes...how long is yous needing me to do it?" Dobby bounced as the idea of an adventure excited him.

"It will only be for a day or two. I'll need you to get the things I've left behind once Moody goes to tell someone that I am missing. Then come to me at Snape Manor."

"Dobby is happy to be doing this for the Great Harry Potter, sir."

"Thank you, Dobby." Harry grinned.

"Yes, thank you very much," Remus added.

"Mr. Mooney is welcome." Dobby then turned a stern gaze on Harry, startling the pair of older wizards. "Yous needs to be eating as much as you can. Yous magical growing up needs all the energy it can get now."

"I will eat all I can, Dobby. These look great."

Dobby smiled and nodded.

"You eat and Dobby will be coming back later." He vanished once again.

"That was truly strange," Severus whispered. "I had no idea a house elf could be that...assertive..."

"Dobby helps me a lot, and from what he told me, the wizard makes the house elf into what ever it is they need them to be." Harry shrugged nonchalantly and started in on his plate of tarts. "I needed a Slytherin house elf and I got one."

"If what you say is true," Severus drawled. "Then I now know why he acts like such a bloody Gryffindor most of the time...are you quite certain he's Slytherin?"

July 22nd, Snape Manor

"Remus?" Harry looked over at Severus as well.

"Yes, Cub?"

"How exactly were you planning on keeping everyone from thinking that Tom has kidnapped me or killed me once they realize I've vanished? I know I haven't told anyone except the crew that I've changed locations, so..."

"How and when did you tell this 'crew' that you had moved?" Severus glared at Harry with a stony expression on his face.

"Dumbledore told me I couldn't use Owl post this summer because of the 'security risks', so the Ministry crew and I have been writing all month and Dobby carries the letters. I wrote a quick note and sent one of your house elves last night since Dobby is a little busy right now." Harry grinned as both men processed the fact that he had conveniently found a way around Albus and even them, apparently.

"You've been using a house elf as a mail carrier all summer?" Remus started laughing and couldn't seem to stop. "Oh, that's brilliant!"

"Yes, well, just be careful what you tell your friends, Harry. They aren't trained in Occlumency yet," Severus grumbled with a small grin. "That was a very Slytherin thing to do, by the way. Bravo."

"They will be trained in Occlumency soon enough," Harry stated confidently. "I sent Hermione my book on the subject and she'll have the others learning it, too. I seem to recall that the Mind Healer tasked Neville and Ron with learning it as part of their therapy, as well, so you might be surprised."

"The Mind Healer told them to learn Occlumency?" Severus asked in a disbelieving tone. "Who the bloody hell is their Mind Healer?"

"I believe Hermione told me his full name and title is Master Mind Healer Octavius Monroe. Does that name mean anything to either of you?"

"The name doesn't, but if he's good enough to be a Master, then he's good...How much has he gone into with the rest of the group?" Remus sat forward eagerly.

"Everything including the Chamber of Secrets, as far as I know," Harry replied. "So, it shouldn't be that hard to get everyone set up with basic shielding. How are we explaining my disappearing act?"

"Remus made a parchment like that damn map of his. What were you having it tell people, Mooney?"

"Albus is under the impression that you and I will be travelling extensively, so I have some arrangements to make to carry out the ruse for now. We will have a trip to take towards the end of August, if you're willing, Cub. How does Ireland sound?"

"I've never been anywhere but London and the area around Hogwarts, so Ireland sounds great. Why are we going to Ireland?"

“The Werewolf Council and some of the Tribes want to meet with you and find out what your views are on the war, werewolf rights and the rights of other magical creatures,” Remus explained.

“Ah. Okay...then I will need information on new and existing law so I know where I stand on them...I don't mind meeting with them, but, uh...when is the most important question. I'd rather not be around a bunch of grumpy werewolves too close to the full moon. I know how you get, Moony.” Harry grinned weakly.

“It will be the week before the full moon, but you won't be alone, Cub, and you won't be there with the Tribes the night of the moon.”

“That I can live with,” Harry agreed. “So, you're going to Gringotts, right? Between Ragnok and Griphook, they should be able to handle anything you want done. I owe Griphook a letter anyway.”

“Ragnok himself would be willing to help you?” Remus sounded stunned and looked like he might fall down if he weren't already seated.

“More than likely, yes. I suppose I could go with you, but I'd rather not be seen coming or going from the bank and give away the fact that I have been actively talking to someone at Gringotts. Dumbledore seems determined to keep me in the dark and I'm determined that he keep thinking I still am. I'll write a letter of introduction for you so that Griphook will talk to you. He's the Potter Estate Manager.” Harry smiled and giggled for a moment before assuming a look of gleeful mischief.

“I don't much care what gets sent to whom, but I do have one request.” Harry's smile turned into a malicious grin. “I want an adult sized Tinker Bell costume complete with 'magic wand' sent to Dumbledore from Disney...I only saw bits of Peter Pan on the telly, and I think it would be a fitting gag gift...”

“What is a Tinker Bell?” Severus inquired, dark eyes full of amused curiosity.

“Tinker Bell is a cute little female fairy that wears this short little yellow shimmering costume and has a wand with a star on top of it. The costume will probably be all glittery and gauzy and so very...girlie.” Harry started to laugh at the idea of Albus Dumbledore dressed as Tinker Bell and was soon on the floor, curled into a ball howling with laughter.

“Hmm, well...I’ll get that letter from him once he calms down and then head straight to Gringotts. I want to have this handled before Moody goes on shift again so I can vanish effectively.”

July 22nd , The Burrow

“Why are you so fascinated by these Muggle gadgets, Dad? I just don’t understand them,” Ron murmured from his seat on a stool near his father’s workbench.

Chuckling, Arthur shrugged and smiled at his youngest son.

“I want to understand what makes them work,” he explained. “For me, they’re a bit like the kinds of magic that don’t make sense no matter how hard I study. It’s a complicated puzzle that I enjoy exploring.”

Nodding his understanding, Ron returned the smile with a grin of his own.

“I understand what you mean when you put it that way. Chess is that way for me...it’s this huge puzzle just begging to be solved.” Sobering, he sighed and turned his gaze to his father’s. “I know why you asked me to come out here with you today. I’m glad you made me go to Healer Monroe. I know I fought it like crazy at first, but he’s been really helpful. I feel a lot better about things that used to bother me.”

“I had hoped you’d come around about it,” Arthur murmured with a light blush. “And I was hoping we could talk about it some. Thank you for convincing your sister and Hermione to go with you. They were both more affected by what happened than I think they were able to admit.”

“We all were,” Ron admitted freely.

"The three of you seem to be a lot happier, healthier, even."

"I think we are, Dad. We're all helping each other."

"Good. Now, how about you bring your mind for puzzles over here and see if you can help me figure out this 'Switch' thingy that Mr. Granger gave me when they dropped Hermione off."

Laughing under his breath, Ron joined his father at the workbench and settled in to study the infinitely complex seeming artefact of Muggle technology.

July 23rd, Snape Manor

Remus leaned against the door frame of Harry's room and watched him read studiously for several long minutes, the sheer normalcy of the moment soothing his Wolf and reassuring him that things with the war and their unusual little family just might turn out okay after all. Then he noticed the ornate oldness of the tome his Cub was reading and wondered what Harry had gotten him self into this time.

"Harry? What in the world are you reading?"

"Hey Remus!" Dropping the book beside him, Harry jumped up and hugged the older wizard. "How are you doing?"

"I'm hanging in there, Cub," Remus replied and returned the surprisingly strong hug. "You've gotten stronger. I guess Dobby really did take good care of you."

"He stuffed me with three solid meals a day plus snacks. I'm actually not skin and bones for once. See?" Harry lifted his shirt to show off a wiry, muscular torso with no ribs to be counted. "No ribs."

Poking Harry in said ribs playfully, Remus grinned his relief over his cubs improved health.

"That's wonderful, Harry. Now, tell me about these books you supposedly have."

"No supposedly about it," Harry stated. "I just don't have them out readily available." He shrugged.

"Dobby went shopping for me. I asked for whatever a young Noble would have learned before attending Hogwarts plus anything he could find on Parseltongue, Occlumency and a few other subjects."

"Dobby was a Malfoy house elf before he became yours," Severus drawled. "Did you not take that into consideration?"

"I really didn't think about it that way, Severus. I knew he was bound to a wealthy household and he would be aware of what I needed to know. Once I saw all the Dark Arts books, I asked him about it."

"Dark Arts, Harry? You know it's illegal to have..." Remus protested.

Harry just looked at the werewolf and shook his head.

"Oh, for crying out loud, Moony...Yes, I know very well how many years in Azkaban my collection is worth. I have a book or two on Wizarding law, as well. Dobby knows I will have to face Dark wizards in the coming months and he had a valid concern. How can I defend myself against what I don't know? The Malfoys are but a taste of what I will have to deal with and I have to be able to duel on their level at least defensively."

"Let me see your collection so I can determine what books are too dark for you to study," Severus stated. "Some things simply won't be safe..."

"No. You will not go through my collection and arbitrarily decide what I do and do not need to know," Harry countered. "Dumbledore did that to me my whole life and I will not allow it to happen again. I will allow you to view my collection and, if you treat me like an adult instead of a child, I will take your comments under advisement, but that is all."

Startled by Harry's stiff resistance to his demand, Severus stared at the younger wizard like he'd finally done something interesting.

"You're telling me no?"

"That's correct, Severus. I will gladly accept your comments and your assistance, but I will not exchange one overly controlling individual for another."

"How about a compromise," Remus suggested calmly when it became evident that Harry was not going to budge. "Promise me you will be careful and that you will not study any of the Dark Arts books without myself or Severus present in case something goes wrong with a practice session."

"Practice session?" Harry asked innocently, but his crooked grin gave him away.

"We know you're not just going to study theory, Cub. What have you already gotten into?"

"Parseltongue magic, which you two couldn't fix, anyway."

"Where did you find Parsel magic?" Severus asked quietly.

"Dobby hoodwinked Mr. Borgin into thinking he was still Lucius' elf and got him to hand over a crate of things that he had requested. It had around twenty books in it, five of Salazar Slytherin's personal journals, a set of knives that I think may have been Salazar's, the Slytherin locket from Grimmauld place and a glass vial full of I don't know what that was also from Grimmauld. I'm going to be having a talk with Mundungus Fletcher about that some time...him and Kingsley. My list of people to have private discussions with seems to be growing." Harry sighed. "Anyway, I'm learning the parsel magic out of one of Salazar's journals."

"What else have you learned from these journals?" Severus inquired.

"The one on potions is where I finally got what I'd been missing in potions class. I didn't know about the interactions table and he explained why it was so important and had his own in the journal. His is the one I memorized. The man must have been incredible to talk to!"

“Harry, Salazar was dark...” Remus protested.

“So is Severus. What’s your point? Dark doesn’t mean evil and Salazar wasn’t evil. Quite dark, yes, but not a Dark Lord by any stretch of the imagination. Half of what we’re taught in history might not even be true! I have some books on Goblin culture and everything that Griphook sent me. The Goblins are a fascinating people, fascinating and very proud. Professor Binns only ever covers the Goblin wars and I’m beginning to wonder how much of what he teaches is accurate.”

“A Goblin gave you books on their culture and everything, as you so eloquently put it, and you have no idea how rare or important that honour is?” Severus just shook his head in quiet amazement.

“How was I supposed to know it was a big deal?” Harry asked pointedly. “I was raised by muggles and no one really ever bothers to tell me anything. I have to find it out by myself. Of course I didn’t know. I probably should have ‘known’ that going to the Goblins for help was a ‘bad idea’, but you know what, I think that move saved my hide.”

Remus gaped at Harry as his Cub wound down from his tirade. The pure, frustrated anger that had fuelled the rant let him know this really had been a long term, ongoing problem.

“Okay, point taken. Now, how about Severus and I agree to stop assuming you are aware of information and to do our best to include you in decision making.”

“I agree to stop assuming you were taught things and to try to include you in decisions,” Severus stated. He studied Harry intently, obsidian eyes full of fierce curiosity. “Who are you and what happened to the Harry Potter I taught at Hogwarts?”

“I’m not really sure that person ever existed, to be honest with you,” Harry stated sadly. “I was under behavioural compulsions, memory charms, heritage suppressions and a whole slew of other spells. I have most of them cleared out now and my core is opened up most

of the way. I wouldn't have known about any of it if Tom hadn't damaged the spells when he possessed me at the Ministry, then pointed it out to me in a dream a few weeks ago."

"You've done all of that on your own?" Severus leaned forward. "May I see?"

Harry eyed the dark eyed wizard warily. His experiences with him and Legilimency had not been pleasant and he wasn't entirely certain he trusted him on this particular issue despite some of their tentative cessation of hostilities.

"I will show you the room and nothing else."

"Fair enough. I just want to see how far along you are on cleaning everything out. I may be able to help with some things."

"Okay...but don't go trying to open any of the trunks or doors. They have parseltongue Trips on them."

"Trips?"

"Yeah, trips. It's a really versatile hallucinatory spell I found in one of Salazar's journals. I'd rather not use you as my first test subject, if you don't mind."

"Thank you for the warning." Severus met the younger man's gaze. "Ready?"

"Of course."

"Legilimens!" Severus expected to get the usual response of seeing whatever he wanted despite what Harry had said. Now he knew the boy had been practicing heavily. He 'tapped' on the shields that stood before him and they parted smoothly; He blanched at the slithering things that occupied the space between the inner and outer walls as he was drawn through by a force that held him firmly in place. Then he was inside a large chamber with Harry.

"This is quite impressive, Harry. You did this just in the last few weeks?"

"In the last month or so, yes," Harry agreed. "As you can see, I have most everything cleared out and organized. Welcome to my Chamber of Secrets."

"Is this how it looks down there?"

"A little bit, yes. How did you like my shields?" Harry had felt the older man's surprise and discomfort when faced with his defences, so he was curious how he would respond. What he wasn't saying told him he had managed to impress the wily spy despite the man's reticence to say so.

"I am curious where you derived your concept and will need to test you out periodically in different situations to make sure they will hold up, but you are doing well." Shaking his head a little, Severus looked around until his gaze fell on a trunk that was distinctively different from all the rest. "What's in that one? All of the others look like your school trunk, I suppose."

"That is where I keep all of the memories I don't want to deal with right now," Harry stated, only to groan when Severus focused on him with a keen intensity. "They're not my memories, Severus. They're Tom's from his first fifty years or so. That's why they're in their own trunk."

Backing down once Harry had answered his question, Severus still couldn't seem to mask his concern.

"Why don't you just get rid of them, Harry? I can show you how to do it. Having those lying around is incredibly dangerous for you."

"No, I'm not going to get rid of them."

"Why not? Are you going to say no to everything I suggest in trying to help you?"

"I'm sorry if it seems that way right now, but there is too much for me to learn from those memories and honestly, I prefer having them with me." Harry shrugged when Severus fumed some more. "How am I supposed to be his equal if I only know fifth year spells? Those memories even us out in the department of knowledge, which leaves me lacking only in experience. I can gain experience a lot faster than I can gain knowledge."

"I suppose, but I would feel better if you simply purged the memories."

"And I have noted your concern. Thank you. Was there anything else you wanted to check?" When the potions master shook his head, Harry placed Severus back outside his shields and blinked at the startled man. "What?"

"Where did you learn to do that?" Slightly disoriented from the sudden shift of perspective, Severus let himself drop down to sit on the couch.

"Um, what?"

"Where did you learn to bring someone into your mind and push them back out again like you just did?"

"I pulled you in because I didn't want you snooping around, and once you were done looking around, I just wanted you back on the outside. Why? Isn't that how it's supposed to be done?"

Remus laughed quietly at the look on the Potions Master's face.

"I think that, however unorthodox your methods, you did it right in the long run."

July 23rd, The Burrow

"Hermione? Can I ask you something and get an honest answer? No holding back?" Ginny chewed on her lower lip and watched the older girl with eyes full of uncertainty and nervous energy.

Concerned as much by the younger girl's uncertainty as the tone of her question, Hermione nodded and sat down on her bed so she could hold onto her friend's cold and trembling hands.

"You know I will always answer you as honestly as I am able. What's bothering you, Gin?"

"Am I going crazy, Hermione? Do you think I'm going to turn out like Bellatrix Lestrange someday?"

Stunned and thrown off balance by the unexpected questions, Hermione's first instinct was to vehemently deny the possibility, but she managed to bite back the words. Forcing her self to honestly consider what she truly thought of Ginny's recent behaviour, she blinked back tears.

"Oh, Gin...as long as you're worried about whether or not you're going crazy, you're not quite there yet," the bushy haired witch whispered and let the tears fall because Ginny had asked her for honesty and she wasn't about to deny her what she needed to know. "I have been worried about you lately. We all have been. Tom hurt you so deeply and none of the rest of us has ever been used or hurt any where close to the same way."

"So, I'm not crazy yet?" Ginny laughed a little and sniffled at the same time. "You're sure?"

"I'm certain you're not crazy yet," Hermione stated emphatically. "We may all be nutters by the time this war is over though, and that's no joke." She sighed and rubbed Ginny's hands to warm them up a little. "As for your turning out like Bellatrix? Well, you're not evil, Gin. Yes, darkness touched you and left its mark, but I'll never believe you to be evil like that woman without evidence I can't repudiate no matter how hard I try."

"Thank you, Hermione...I just...what Ron said made me see how I was thinking about a lot of things," Ginny explained. "And this isn't something new, either...it's just clearer now..."

“What have you been thinking about?” Hermione gently encouraged the younger girl to continue speaking. The look in her eyes said she needed to get this information off her chest before she did lose it.

“If I tell you, then you will think I’m crazy or something...”

“No, I won’t, Ginny. Just tell me. You clearly need to tell someone or you wouldn’t have brought it up.”

“Yeah, I guess you’re right,” Ginny squeezed Hermione’s hands, then pulled away; this discussion needed distance, not comfort.

“I’d do anything for Harry. You know that, don’t you?” she whispered, her bright brown gaze locked on Hermione’s darker brown. “He saved my father’s life and that is a debt I can never repay, but even more difficult still is that he saved my life, my magic and my very soul...how can you repay that debt to someone when you cannot even properly articulate its worth?” She spoke the next part very clearly so the other girl could make no mistake in her meaning. “I will defend his life, name and reputation to the death. My wand is his to call whether he knows it or not.”

The words themselves made perfect sense to Hermione; she could even comprehend a little bit of why the girl would feel the way she did. She, after all, owed her own set of debts to a certain black haired, green eyed wizard. What disturbed her was the near fanatic gleam in the depths of Ginny’s eyes – that look only faintly echoed the mad loyalty of Bellatrix Lestrange, but it was enough to make the bushy haired witch swallow carefully. Now she understood why Ron had felt compelled to speak to her as he had and why Ginny so fervently feared madness. The seeds had already been planted and the soil was fertile.

“You’re not crazy, Ginny.” She declared just as strongly as before. “But you have to think before you act, alright? You can’t just go around hexing everyone who talks bad about Harry. You’d be hexing half of the wizarding world!”

Ginny giggled, then laughed outright and that fanatical gleam faded away. She grinned at Hermione and shifted over to hug her firmly.

“That wouldn’t be good at all, would it, now...”

Molly Weasley knew her youngest children were having difficulties, but for once she had no idea how to approach the subject. Ron’s scarred arms and haunted eyes rendered her speechless as quickly as Ginny’s own newly pain filled gaze or Hermione’s quiet sadness. She didn’t know all of the details about what had happened to her babies, including Hermione and Harry, but she did have one solace. She had seen them helping each other and ever since they all started going to the mind healer, they seemed better than they had before. What concerned her most was that Ginny seemed to be okay before she went to the Healer...it was only after the first visit that she became so haunted. The healer was supposed to help her get better, not make her worse than she was before.

The ‘children’ in question came trooping downstairs before she had to call them and she smiled. They all looked better today, but Ginny especially seemed brighter, less weighed down.

“How are all of you feeling? You’ve had a hard time of it lately.”

Sitting down at the table between his Dad and Hermione, Ron grinned even as his stomach growled demandingly.

“I’m doing a lot better, Mum. Healer Monroe has been a great help, but the biggest help has been everyone else. I wouldn’t have gone if you and Dad hadn’t pushed the issue.” Ron blushed scarlet when Molly hugged him fiercely and kissed his forehead. “AH! Mum! Gerroff!”

Laughing, Hermione shook her fork at Ron and sobered into her best Professor McGonagall impersonation.

“You have worried your mother sick, Ronald Weasley! Don’t you dare give her any trouble, young man.”

“You sound pretty well back to normal yourself, there, Hermione,” Arthur said and nearly choked on his tea when he tried to drink and laugh at the same time. Coughing a bit, he finally cleared his throat

and shook his head. "You have been keeping in touch with your parents, haven't you? This isn't something to keep from them..."

"I am feeling very much back to normal," Hermione agreed. "And Ron is right. Healer Monroe encourages us at every visit to seek the help that only our friends and family can give. If Psychiatrists, muggle Mind healers, were able to help people the way it's done in the wizarding world, a lot of bad things wouldn't happen as often."

"I didn't know what the muggles called their mind healers," Molly mused. "But I'm glad they have them. I can't imagine what it would be like we didn't have Mind Healers...that doesn't bear much thought."

"I completely agree," Hermione commented. "As for post, I've sent my parents a few letters through the muggle post so they wouldn't have to explain the owls."

"Ah. I sometimes forget your parents are muggles, Hermione. They are very good people."

"Why, thank you, Mr. Weasley." Hermione beamed at the older man.

"And how about you, Ginny? You look happier today," Molly observed and held her breath expectantly.

Thinking back to her earlier conversation with Hermione, the youngest Weasley smiled genuinely.

"I am feeling a lot better, Mum. It may take a while, but I'm getting there. Time heals a lot of things when you give it the chance to do its work."

"You're sure, dear? You seemed so much more distraught after you started going to the Healer..." Molly trailed off, her uncertainty visible to all.

"There were things I needed to deal with and couldn't because they were hidden away. Now that I can see the problems, I am dealing with them. Don't worry, Mum. I really do feel better than I have in a long time. Once I've finished working things out, I'll sit down with you

and explain everything, okay?" Ginny smiled winningly and her mother relaxed.

"I'll hold you to it, Ginevra Weasley." Molly's tone left no room for argument.

July 23rd, #4 Privet Drive

As paranoid as ever, Alastor Moody arrived at the Dursley home and discovered that Mundungus Fletcher had left early yet again. Cursing the con artist for being the worthless bum he was, he scanned the yard – front and back – and then focused on the house.

Sensing the arrival of another wizard, Dobby cautiously peeked out and vanished when he saw Moody. Settling far enough away to go unnoticed, the elf waited for the retired Auror to leave so he could retrieve his Master's belongings and finally return to his side.

Seeing that Harry's school trunk and owl cage were still present and noting the absence of the Dursleys, Harry and the car, Moody decided to wait for the muggles to return before reporting to Albus. As it stood, something felt off, but he couldn't quite seem to place what it was.

The Dursleys returned a few hours later and a quick glance showed that there was no sign of Harry. Moody apparated to the park just in case the boy had gone there, but a quick search showed no sign of him.

"Neat trick, but how did you do it?" he wondered and vanished with a soft 'crack'. Reappearing near Grimmauld Place, he stormed into the house and headed for the fireplace. "Incendio!"

Assured that Moody was gone, Dobby popped into Harry's old room and gathered up everything of his Master's. He dropped what looked to be a blank piece of parchment on the bed just before he vanished, leaving no trace of the young wizard who had once occupied the small room.

Throwing a handful of floo powder into the fire, Moody stuck his head in the fire and called out his destination.

“Headmaster’s office, Hogwarts!”

A shrill alarm greeted him and he hit his head on the upper edge of the fireplace in his haste to get away from the almost painful screeching. Rubbing the back of his head ruefully, he growled.

“Obviously not there.” Adding more floo powder, he called out another destination. “Dumbledore Manor! Albus! You had better be here, you barmy old coot! Albus Dumbledore!”

Resisting the urge to laugh only because Alastor sounded so upset, Albus stepped into view.

“Whatever is the problem, Alastor?”

“Potter’s missing! He and his relatives were gone when I arrived, but the muggles came home without Potter. The boy’s things were still there, so I don’t know where he’s gotten off to and there’s some infernal alarm screeching like a banshee in your office.”

“Return to the Dursley home. I will check my office and join you there shortly.” Albus immediately apparated to his office and silenced the offending alarm. A quick scan of the device showed that Harry had been gone for a little over four hours.

“Damn the boy! Why does he insist on making things more complicated than they need to be?”

Alastor froze when he returned to number four Privet Drive and did a quick scan of the house. Harry’s belongings were now gone. No trace of the boy remained.

“What the bloody hell?! They had to have been watching to know I was gone, but if they were close enough to know I was gone then I would have seen them...” At a loss on explaining how Severus and Remus had managed to pull off this prank, the retired Auror just shook his head and settled into wait on Albus.

“He left a little over four hours ago, Alastor. How long ago did you arrive?”

“A little over four hours ago, but he was gone when I arrived, as was Fletcher, the lazy bum. I hope whatever scheme he was counting on paid off real well this time because it had damn well better have been worth it!”

Alastor growled under his breath and slowly calmed himself. “Now Potter’s things are gone and I don’t understand it, Albus! That trunk and Owl cage were here when I left to find you...”

Albus nodded, twinkle diminished considerably by his old friend’s news.

“Let us go speak with the Muggles, then.” Striding up to the door, the tall, white haired wizard opened the door with a wave of his hand.

“Vernon and Petunia Dursley! Where is Harry Potter?”

“In his bloody room where he always is, you old freak!” Vernon cowered back from the combined anger of two wizards and shook his head. “He hasn’t left his room!”

“He’s not in his room, Dursley. Where is he?” Moody demanded. “Did you let someone come in and take him?”

“No one’s been here but us,” Petunia declared tremulously. “No one but us. The boy has barely been coming out to eat other than when he did the yard work. How were we to know he was gone? Good riddance, I say!”

“Why didn’t you do as I instructed in the letter I sent you?” Albus seethed inside and that seething became a full boil when both muggles gave him back blank, uncomprehending stares.

“What letter?” Vernon asked. “We didn’t get any letters from you people this summer.”

“No letters at all,” Petunia agreed defiantly.

Curious about the cold fury he could see in his old friend’s eyes, Moody fell back into observation mode and decided to simply follow the older wizard’s lead for now.

“We should probably check the boy’s room, Albus.”

Nodding tersely, Albus spun on his heel and led the way upstairs. The door swung open easily and they were greeted by the sight of nothing but a spotlessly clean room.

“There’s a piece of parchment on the bed,” Moody commented. “Looks magical to me.”

Checking the paper for curses and the port key spell and finding none, Albus picked up the paper, which immediately began to fill with writing as if someone were using an invisible quill. Albus sighed his exasperation when he recognized the irreverent style.

Messrs. Moony and Prongs Jr. present their compliments to Messrs. Mad-Eye and Dumbledore and respectfully request that they keep their overly long beaks out of other people’s business.

Mr. Prongs Jr. has stated a desire to take a vacation and to make the most of this unprecedented opportunity to see the world. Mr. Moony is in complete agreement and thinks a long trip is a brilliant idea.

Mr. Moony promises to have Mr. Prongs Jr. back – with his school supplies – in time to ride the Hogwart’s Express on September 1st. Until then, Messrs. Moony and Prongs Jr. will be enjoying themselves and promise to send postcards.

P.S. Mr. Prongs Jr. would appreciate it if Mr. Dumbledore would forward his O.W.L. scores and other correspondence to him through Ms. Hedwig. Ms. Hedwig is the only owl likely to be able to reach Mr. Prongs Jr. before September 1st.

Fuming, Albus folded the offending parchment and stuffed it in his pocket.

“There is no need to remain here, Alastor. Remus has taken Harry. Start the search for Harry and Remus immediately.” Albus frowned. “Find Fletcher, too, just in case his negligence has allowed this disaster to occur.”

“Of course, Albus.” Moody apparated away.

Standing alone in the smallest bedroom at number four Privet Drive, Albus Dumbledore looked around and saw the possibility of all of his carefully laid plans falling apart around him.

July 24th , Snape Manor

“Something’s eating at you, Harry. What is it?” Severus was only too aware of the teen’s increasingly moodier turn as they approached his birthday and hoped this issue – whatever it happened to be – wouldn’t test his tenuous emotional control too harshly.

“I didn’t really understand what hate was before all of this crap with Dumbledore and my family and everything came out.” That quiet statement forcefully drew both men’s undivided attention to Harry. “I would say ‘I hate that...’ with no concept of what HATE was.” Harry sighed almost silently. “Now, I am truly starting to understand.”

“What brought you to this conclusion?” came the cautious inquiry from Severus. This was going to be a disturbing discussion and he wasn’t sure he was up to it, but at least he wasn’t alone in dealing with it. Remus was there, too, and he looked about as happy as Severus felt.

“Something happened when Tom possessed me. His presence in my mind hurt so badly...but then it faded all of a sudden and the bond between us lit up like an over-powered Lumos spell. He acted really nervous then, and I shoved him out, not that he fought me on it. A little while after everything at the Ministry, once I was home from school, Tom came to me in a dream and showed me what happened at the Ministry like I was in a Pensive...a lot of things started to make more sense and we finally met up in the Chamber in my mind again,

like we did when he possessed me.” Harry paused to gather his thoughts.

“He showed me all of the spells that had been cast on me and told me to break free of them...I’ve been working on that all month.”

“Can you see the bond now?” Remus asked gently.

“If I focus and go to my core, where we were when he possessed me and where I go when I dream, it shows up as a door...a door that opens both ways.”

“What about all of this brought you to the realization of hate?”

“Dumbledore. He put compulsions on my friends so they couldn’t talk about all the dangerous things we got into at school. He put loyalty and trust compulsions on Hermione. He caged my magic so tightly and severely that I’m surprised I could breathe, let alone cast any spells. He lied to me about who my relatives were and kept me from being with people who would have loved me. He allowed me to be abused and starved for almost 15 years. And it was all for the greater good.” Harry put the last two words in air quotes and snorted derisively.

“Whose greater good did he do these things for? Yours? His? Mine? Tom’s? The rest of the Wizarding World that’s too cowed to stick their necks out and fight for what they believe in? Did anyone benefit from those manipulations except Albus fucking Dumbledore?”

July 24th, St. Mungo’s, Office of Master Mind Healer Octavius Monroe

Relaxing back in his chair once he had his office all to himself again, Healer Monroe raised his arms and clasped his hands behind his head in a pose of complete relaxation while a pleased yet wistful smile curved his lips.

“They won’t need me for much longer,” he mused quietly. “Ginny might need to come back every so often, but the others...they’ll be

fine on their own unless something else happens to bring them back to me.”

He chewed on his lower lip and sighed, mind drifting to Neville. As far as he could tell, there wouldn't be anything else he could do to that old Obliviate without potentially doing more harm than good. Immensely pleased with the progress that Neville had already made since they had begun, he shook his head. The teen was more confident, more focused and his magic was noticeably stronger since they had begun to work on the spell removal. His memory retention and recall had improved exponentially, and that seemed to be the greatest source of pride for the young man short of his magical improvements.

“That was definitely a good bit of work,” he commented to himself with a pleased grin, which deepened when his thoughts turned to Luna. Now there is one unique young lady. So much of what bothered the rest of the group just rolled off of her back, like she knows more than the rest of us, or perhaps like she is far older than her years. I will definitely remember her for years to come.

His original patient out of the five came to mind and his smile held. Ron had finally made a breakthrough and was no longer fighting the healing process. He would need a few more sessions at most, and then he should be fine to stop unless he felt a need to come in.

And then there was Hermione. Miss Granger is a very challenging young woman, he mused. Her intelligence and her will power make her a difficult subject to work on. I'm surprised that the compulsions held as long as they did on her. More likely than not, the suggestions worked because she already trusted authority figures, and will do so until their actions become illogical in her perceptions. Hopefully this incident has not damaged her ability to trust.

His smile finally faded as his thoughts returned to Ginny. He had wondered about the intensely organized nature of her mind and her strong grasp of Occlumency, especially when she claimed to have never studied the subject, but more information on her experiences with Tom Riddle's diary had explained that. The only logical conclusion he could come up with was that, in the process of the

possession, Riddle had forced her thought processes to echo his own style, including the use of Occlumency to hide his presence. Sadly, this had now become her 'natural' way of processing thoughts and information, and she had no desire to change it.

She has a frightening potential for violence and a wavering grasp of reality that seems to be stabilized by the support of Mr. Weasley and Miss Granger. The whole group seems to be aware of her fragile state and they are doing everything they can for her.

"Hopefully I'll be able to get her stabilized before school starts up again. I need to speak to Mr. Potter soon. He seems to play a key role in stabilizing her more radical tendencies..."

July 24th , Unplottable Location

Crimson eyes followed the spells being sent back and forth as Bellatrix ran two groups through the basic scenario that they should encounter when they attacked Azkaban. Half of each group was pretending to be Aurors while the other half played their true roles and fought to incapacitate as many as possible without unnecessary kills.

Voldemort smirked. There was no mercy in his intentions for the raid that would occur on the next night. No, on the contrary, his intentions were quite cruel and he revelled in thoughts of how the Ministry and the Wizarding populace would react to his surgical strike.

Throwing in some stinging hexes of his own while Bella worked to drive the Death Eaters through this critical training in group tactics, he nodded appreciatively. None of his followers had been inept duellers, but this wasn't duelling – this was full out war – and the tactics required were very different.

Fighting their way across what appeared to be a sparsely wooded area that offered little in the way of cover, the advancing Death Eaters signalled to each other silently and continued their forward assault as the sounds of resistance faded. Stinging hexes struck powerfully from the side and behind and gonged off of the shields

being maintained by several apparently passive members of the unit. Splitting their shields to offer more support to the quadrants that were under attack, they reacted instinctively to the newest threat and continued on to the end of the scenario without losses for the first time after a week of intensive training.

The sound of quiet clapping drew everyone up short. Turning to face the unexpected sound, the Death Eaters went to one knee before their Lord when he stepped out of his shadowed corner. Bellatrix knelt nearest him and barely suppressed the urge to tremble. If he wasn't pleased with her efforts and the progress of his followers, then...she chose not to think of what her fate might be.

"You have improved greatly my Death Eaters," Voldemort uttered in praise. "Work hard this night, for the next time you fight together will be very real." He smiled this time. "Continue and do not be surprised if I throw a hex or two my self."

"Attackers, you will now be the defending Aurors! The rest of you get out here. We have a lot left to work on and I for one do not plan to fail," Bellatrix snarled as the lower ranked Death Eaters scrambled into their new positions. Sparing a glance at her clearly amused Lord, Bellatrix suppressed a shiver. No, she definitely could not afford to fail him again.

Bored with watching the training that had been going on for many an hour, Voldemort retreated to his study and got comfortable behind his desk. Carefully opening the link between himself and Harry, he slipped into the younger wizard's mind and froze involuntarily. There, sitting on the floor next to a fully opened pool of shimmering power was the Boy Who Bloody Wouldn't Die, and he was currently looking at Tom with an expression of open amusement.

"Hello, Harry. Working on your Occlumency, I see." Knowing that it was inane to state the obvious didn't make it any easier to cover his surprise at getting caught walking in the door, as it were.

Drawn by the unplanned motion, Harry's eyes focused on the door between his mind and Tom's as it slowly opened. He fought to not laugh as The Dark Lord carefully slipped inside and froze with the

most comical look of surprise on his face when he realized his attempt at being sneaky had backfired.

“Yes, I was working on my Occlumency,” he replied with a snigger. “Was there a particular reason why you were sneaking in?”

“Ah, well...I was bored,” Voldemort admitted with a slight wince. “There isn’t anyone to talk to that won’t tell me exactly what they think I want to hear.”

“I suppose I can understand that,” Harry mused pensively, thoughts briefly returning to the tirade of a few hours prior that had led him back to practicing his Occlumency so he could calm down enough to be civil. Wondering at the decided lack of hate he was feeling towards the murderer of his parents, he studied him quizzically. He killed my parents purely for being in his way, for defying his will. His followers and their spawn have made my life as miserable as possible and Tom has tried to kill me on several occasions, but I still don’t hate him. I don’t like him and I definitely don’t trust him, but... Harry sighed audibly.

“Sit down, Tom. What did you want to talk about this time? My training?”

Amused by the resignation in the teen’s voice, Voldemort sat on the floor across from his rival and shrugged.

“I can tell you’ve been studying, a fact that pleases me greatly. From the looks of things, you’ve really got a gift for curse breaking, as well,” Voldemort mused.

“Curse breaking? All I did was unravel the spells that didn’t belong...that or I just hammered through them.” The green eyed wizard unconsciously echoed Voldemort’s shrug. “That’s what you intended when you showed them to me in the first place, right?”

“I intended for you to, perhaps, weaken the spells a bit so it would be easier for your magical maturity to scour them all away,” Voldemort clarified. “It was something I mistakenly thought would be an exercise in futility for you...in any case, what you did is what curse breakers do,

Harry. They unravel or destroy wards and spells, and you, my Little Serpent, appear to be quite gifted at the skill.”

Contemplating the relaxed teenager sitting only a few feet away from him, Voldemort unconsciously twinned his companion’s earlier thoughts as he privately wondered at the boy’s lack of fear and other negative emotions in relation to his presence. He should be able to taste a low undercurrent of nervousness or fear at the very least and none of it was there.

“I don’t see fear in your eyes anymore, Little One...no hate and no fear. Why is that? You are meant to fear me for what I am and to hate me for what I have done to you.”

“I was actually wondering about that myself, and I can’t say that I like you and I know better than to trust you,” Harry stated bluntly. “Yes, you killed my parents, but Peter and a few others have earned my revenge for their betrayals. You’ve made my life a living hell, but you aren’t the only influence to ensure that my life would turn out the way it has. Yes, you have deceived me to get me to do what you wanted me to do, but it was a deception that I could have seen if my mind had been my own. So far, I haven’t caught you in a lie and that is far more than I can say for Dumbledore and many others. That alone offers you at least a small measure of respect in my book.” Harry smiled crookedly. “No, I don’t really hate you and I don’t fear you. I understand you far too well for that, Tom.”

“Do you hate Dumbledore?” Voldemort asked the question and resisted the urge to flinch away from the fifteen year old wizard as eyes the colour of the death curse flared maliciously and the pool between them roiled with sudden violence. No, his hate is definitely not for me...I wonder if ‘good’ old Albus has even an inkling...

“I don’t know for sure, not yet,” the boy mused as if unaware of his own reactions to the subject. “I’m still finding out about everything he’s done. I’m sure you’ll know when I figure it out.”

“I don’t doubt that for a moment, my Little Serpent.” Contemplating the youth seated across from him, Voldemort decided to see how far down the path he could lead the powerful novice without resorting to

the lies and subterfuge that Dumbledore seemed to prefer. "If I send you some of the books that I collected before I formally began my first reign, will you at least look through them?"

Eyes wide, all previous thoughts of Dumbledore swept away by his surprise, Harry tilted his head to one side and made a questioning noise. He finally found his voice.

"You really were serious about my being fully prepared to face you..."

Looking quite offended, Voldemort sat up straighter.

"Of course I was serious, you little brat! Why else would I say it?"

"Oh, I don't know...to distract me from something that you didn't want me to notice at the time, or maybe to confuse me," Harry theorized. "I couldn't assume that you meant anything else by it."

Grumbling under his breath, Voldemort had to accept the boy's logic. Though he was serious about Harry meeting him on equal footing, he had intended to confuse and distract him at the time.

"Fair enough, but my offer is genuine. You have always been a challenging opponent, but when next we battle, I intend for it to be a true challenge for both of us."

"A true challenge," the younger wizard breathed his green eyes full of excitement and anticipation over those three words. "Alright. I'll look through the books you send me once my House Elf checks them for curses. Would you prefer to send one of your elves or that I send mine to pick the books up from you?"

"Send your elf. I have no desire to lose any of mine to your strange ideas about House elf freedom," Voldemort stated. "I'll have a few books ready to get you started in a day or two. I have to find them all."

"Fine. I'll send my elf to you on Friday, if that's alright."

Voldemort nodded and rose to move towards the door. Upon reaching it, he paused and turned back to meet Harry's gaze.

"The enemy of my enemy is my friend."

"For how long?" Harry met Voldemort's gaze unflinchingly. At this point, any reprieve would be acceptable so long as he understood the terms.

"Until Dumbledore is no longer a thorn in our collective side. At that point we will have to re-evaluate our...relationship. Do you agree?"

"What about your Death Eaters?"

"Why, my Little Serpent, who else are you supposed to practice on? I promise to not send them after you deliberately, however. Do you agree?"

"I agree. Do you?"

"I agree." Magic flared between the two powerful wizards and Voldemort was gone by the time it had faded, the door firmly closed behind him.

"A truce of sorts until Dumbledore is no longer a problem..." Harry couldn't resist a full out burst of laughter as the potential implications of their pact sank in.

Back in his own body, feet still propped up on his desk, Voldemort smiled to himself.

"That's one less thing to worry about right now. Tomorrow, I take Azkaban."

Translations:

Semper Fidelis ab Verum - Always steadfast and true (The Longbottom family credo)

“...Skin against skin blood and bone

You're all by yourself but you're not alone

You wanted in now you're here

Driven by hate consumed by fear

Let the bodies hit the floor...”

- Drowning Pool “Bodies”

July 25th , Azkaban Prison

Concealed by the inky darkness of storm shrouded skies, six groups of ten Death Eaters moved forward on silenced feet down the rocky, sparsely wooded slope that led up to Azkaban's only means of access – the docks. Communicating with silent gestures, they split, three groups moving forward with almost brazen openness while the other three cast the disillusionment charm on themselves and vanished into the woods like living shadows.

Standing alone further up the slope, the Dark Lord Voldemort was a shape made of a deeper darkness that seemed to shine starkly in the gloom. His crimson gaze brightened with satisfaction as the first of his Death Eaters clashed with the Aurors who were stationed to guard the quay. He could almost taste the confusion and fear laced relief of the defenders when the spells they faced remained ever so purposefully below the level of the Unforgivables.

“No beautiful green death to spur your adrenaline tonight, my dear Aurors,” he whispered into the quickening wind. “No help and no mercy for any of you on this night,” he mused and held back his laughter for now. When the time was right, he would show himself and destroy what remaining hope they had left.

Using Reductos and Stupefies to herd the Aurors into a tighter and tighter formation, Bellatrix led the assault with joy in her heart and a crazed laugh bubbling up from between her lips. Gesturing to signal that it was time to tighten the noose she surveyed the result and

nodded her satisfaction before raising a tightly closed fist into the air. Spells lit up the night with magical fire that served as fuel for the discordant symphony of shields gonging an almost musical warning tone before they shattered like glass under the hammer that was the Death Eater's assault.

Stalking into view when the Auror's defences began to buckle under the pressure of insurmountable odds, Voldemort let his own high pitched laughter loose and aimed his wand at the soon to be vanquished wizards.

Senior Auror and Order member Hestia Jones would never have denied her surprise when the unit of twenty Aurors she was commanding was suddenly descended upon by several small but incredibly well organized units of what appeared to be new Death Eaters. They had to be new. Everyone knew that no seasoned Death Eater would ever hold back from using the Unforgivables on a whim. Would they?

Forcefully drawing herself out of her reverie, she fought fiercely and gave as much encouragement to her men as she could. It was only twenty or thirty new recruits versus her twenty battle trained Aurors and she was confident in their ability. She realized with a sick lurch in her stomach that her group had only seen half of the attacking force when the spells began to rain down on them from behind and the circle of enemies tightened around them, leaving no route open for escape.

"Rear defence!" she shouted out. Night became like day as dozens of spells bounced off of their shields before a rapid gonging signalled the shattered collapse of nearly everything they had between them and certain death. She and her men quickly discovered that that disheartening sound wasn't nearly as devastating as the sight of Lord Voldemort himself firing spells into their midst. The last thing Hestia Jones saw before the darkness took her was cold, red eyes.

"Bind them all! Bella, take two of your teams with you and begin suppressing any resistance on the Island. I will be across to join you with our 'guests' in short order," Voldemort ordered with a gleeful

smirk that instantly faded into cold calculation as twenty Death Eaters rushed away on her heels to do his bidding.

“Wormtail! Take your group across once the boats return and mop up any resistance that remains and capture those who may be trying to escape at the docks.”

Wormtail bowed nearly to the ground and scurried off with his group of ten. His Master’s power was a glorious thing to behold tonight and he had no desire to be punished when the Dark Lord was riding such an emotional high.

Gesturing for the remainder of his followers to fall into step behind him, Voldemort led the way down to the docks with an entourage of thirty Death Eaters and twenty unconscious and bound Aurors floating in tow behind them.

Met with a slightly more motivated and considerably better protected resistance at Azkaban’s outer gates, Bellatrix gestured for the others to continue with their assigned duties while she worked to target the better hidden Aurors with strategically aimed Crucios. Standing in clear view, trusting the shield men to protect her, she snarled and laughed madly at the Aurors.

“You can’t fight if you’re screaming!” Catching sight of one who had grown too bold for his own good, she cast with her renowned skill and accuracy and a scream pierced the night, a scream that suddenly came closer and then ended with a sickening thud and crunch. The unexpected loss seemed to stun the aurors into a momentary stillness that the Death Eaters did not honour.

Wormtail directed his men forward and the unexpected addition of reinforcements signalled the end for the confused and disorganized Aurors. In less than twenty minutes all told, the Island of Azkaban had fallen to Lord Voldemort’s forces.

Watching as his followers forced twenty-five unconscious Aurors into a kneeling position and left them on the stone walkway so tightly bound they could barely breathe, Voldemort stalked forward with predatory grace and smiled cruelly.

"You have done very well so far my faithful Death Eaters, but the night is not over. Do not let your guard down until our coup is complete," he commanded in a tone that allowed no room for doubt or argument. "Enervate!" he commanded with a sweeping gesture of his hand, crimson gaze coming to light on Hestia Jones as the group of prisoners jerked awake under the force of his spell.

"You I remember from the last war." He smirked in the face of her defiant glare and sketched a mocking bow. "As defiant as always, I see, but this will be your last night of such wilful striving. Watch and come to know the power you should have chosen to follow!"

Turning away from the struggling Aurors, Voldemort faced the gates of Azkaban and released his control over his aura of power while sending a surge of magic into the Citadel to call forth the Dementors.

Fighting to control her fear of the mad man before her, Hestia shrank back from him and whimpered when the Dark Lord's unrestrained power beat at her mind and body in an almost physical attack. Tears of defeat ran unheeded down her face.

"Can't be real...can't be true..."

Voldemort stood tall under the rush of bone deep chill that swept out from the approaching Dementors and filled the quay with despair, making his Death Eaters and the prisoners cringe away with equal alacrity. The wind stirred back to its previous ferocity, increasing the chill and whipping his cloak around him as if it, like the Dementors, was a thing born of the shadows.

The largest of the Dementors glided forward and seemed to assess the proud and defiant wizard that stood before it.

"For what purpose do you summon us, Dark One?" The 'nails being dragged across a chalkboard' quality of the creature's voice sent those who were able cringing even further away from the tableau between Voldemort and the Hive Master. The prisoners just hunched further into their bonds and prayed to be ignored.

“Join me,” Voldemort declared boldly. “Join me and your brethren.”

“Why should we aid you? You already claim dominion over one of our Hives. You cannot possibly believe that you, a mere wizard, can provide for more than what you already command.” The disdain in the creature’s voice was a tangible thing that seemed to want to reach out and strike Voldemort for his arrogance.

“I have much to offer,” Voldemort countered.

“Here, we feed at will and my Hive is safe. What more security than that can your mortal power possibly offer us?”

“Yes, it is true that you do have security here,” Voldemort agreed. “But I offer you a much greater opportunity, Hive Master. How long has it been since your Hive was allowed to breed? How long since you have been free to feed on more than the emotions of your prey? Join me and there will be only the mildest of restrictions on your feeding habits.” He paused and could taste the Dementor’s eagerness on his tongue like a fine wine. “I offer you the right to breed. I offer you free feeding on all but those I have marked as mine. The only other individual I ask you to spare is my enemy, Harry Potter.”

“Freedom to breed and freedom to feed on all but those you laid claim to through your Mark and your rival, The Chosen?” The Hive Leader seemed to consider that for but a moment before gliding forward with deadly speed, its skeletal hands holding Voldemort’s face firmly in their grasp before the Dark Lord could react or even think to back away. “I must taste of your truth before I can make such a decision for my Hive.”

Hearing the Dementor speak in such a gentle tone put Voldemort off balance. Whatever is it talking about? He had time to wonder that one thing before his Death Eater’s cries of outrage and horror came to his ears as if from a great distance. He could only stare, fascinated and enraptured, into the onrushing face of death as the creature’s hood obscured his view of everything else. A cold, bitterly painful sensation invaded his entire being and the most feared Dark Lord in centuries did something he had sworn he would never do – he surrendered to

the inevitability of death. His body jerked sharply and went utterly still in the Hive Master's grip.

The truth of the Dark Lord's intentions towards the Dementors flavoured every particle of his essence and the Hive stirred eagerly around their leader. They all agreed with him unanimously on this issue – release the Dark One to his life so that they might live freely under his Dominion. Bowing to the collective desires of his Hive, the Hive Master moved back from Voldemort's face and released his soul back into its shell of flesh and blood.

Jerking sharply yet again and gasping to suck in as much air as possible, Voldemort let the Dementor steady him while he recovered what he could of his shattered composure. That was NOT what he had expected from his meeting with the Dementors.

"Your soul speaks of your intentions, Dark One. We will join you," the Hive Master stated and caressed Voldemort's face with both hands before gliding away a few feet. "What would you have us do?"

Feeling stronger than ever before and equally as weak as a newborn babe, Voldemort drew in a deep breath before replying. He would deal with this lingering weakness later...later or never if he could avoid looking too closely at it. Standing tall once more, he organized his scattered thoughts.

"Bring me all of the prisoners within Azkaban's walls. I will offer my Mark or death to those strong enough to serve me. Those who choose death or who are too weak to be of use to our cause are yours to do with as you please."

"What of your prisoners, Dark One?"

"I am going to offer them the same option. Those who refuse me will also be yours." Voldemort turned his crimson gaze to the huddled Aurors once the Dementors had drifted away to carry out his requests. "You see? I am not without some small amount of mercy and forgiveness and I am going to triumph. Join me."

“That’s it? Join you just like that?” One of the older Aurors laughed, but the sound was choked with fear and resignation. “You’re a monster and no one with a scrap of loyalty to the Light would join you!”

Hestia shook her head in silent denial, the words of her fellow Auror sparking her hope back to life. Deep in her heart, in the freshness of her loyalty to Dumbledore, she believed that the Order was on the way to save them from this fate and that certainty blazed in her eyes.

“Albus Dumbledore will stop you. A company of Aurors and members of the Order of the Phoenix will be here before you can get away with this!” she declared, back straightening with the strength of her belief. “Albus will send you running with your tail between your legs!”

“Such fervent belief in your Minister and the dogma of a manipulative and deceitful old man,” Voldemort teased mockingly – he was clearly in no hurry to depart the site of his conquest. “Your great Albus Dumbledore is the one who helped make me the wizard I am today. He will not be here in time to save any of you.”

Turning, Voldemort acknowledge his disgraced inner circle; crimson eyes filled with disdain as he observed their weakened magic and visibly ruined appearances. He stepped closer to speak for their ears only.

“You are my Inner Circle, the best of my Death Eaters and yet you fell to the meagre strength of a handful of school children and a few Order members. Lucius, as leader of this group, you have much to atone for, but make no mistake. All of you will be punished for this failure, but this is neither the time nor the place for such things.” He stepped back and spoke for all to hear. “Rejoin your brothers and sisters, my loyal Death Eaters. I welcome you home to my ranks.”

He watched the eleven haggard men slowly make their way to the Haven of the gathered Death Eaters before turning his attention to the sixty or so released prisoners who sprawled, knelt or stood before him. His gaze roamed over them all before he spoke.

"I give you all a choice," he stated and noted which ones responded with a more focused gaze. "I give you the choice of freedom through my Mark and the satisfaction of fighting on the winning side or Death. Either way, you will be free of this place. If you wish to join me, then go to my Death Eaters and they will shelter you. Those who choose death need do nothing more than wait for it to come upon you."

Half of the men who stood or knelt before him sketched some sort of bow and made their way to the dark solidarity of Voldemort's followers. Smiling his pleasure, Voldemort gave the Aurors one last chance to defect.

"One last chance at life, my dear Aurors. Turn from me now, and death is your only option." Hiding his surprise when three of the younger Aurors threw themselves forward against their bonds and swore to follow him, he smirked. "You will be made to prove you intentions in the very near future. For now, go to your new brothers and sisters," he stated and freed them with a seemingly careless gesture. He held no illusions that he would have to kill them once it came to the initiation ceremony, but that was days in the future. Their proven loyalty would serve to cement his hold on the others nearly as well as their deaths should they choose to betray him. Shaking his head over the tired defiance of the remaining Aurors, he sighed and the sound was full of the deep disappointment that only a parent can convey when their child has made a particularly foolish choice.

"So be it. Those prisoners who have not joined my ranks are yours, Hive Master. Enjoy this feast with my respectful compliments."

Watching as the Aurors screamed and fought to escape the Dementors, Voldemort licked his lips and savoured the pure rush of fear and the shocking level of Hunger that filled the air as the Dementors descended on the strongest of the prisoners first before turning on the less satisfying fare that was the souls of the broken ones. Purring his pleasure, he turned away from the spectacle only when one of his newer Elite called out that there was an incoming force approaching using the boats from the opposite quay.

"Hive Master."

“Yes, Dark One.”

“Cover our escape from these interlopers and then join me at my Manor.”

“As you command, Dark One.” The Hive Master moved forward and was followed by a shadowy wave of more than fifty Dementors. “We are truly free to feast?”

“You are welcome to do so as long as it does not violate the terms of our pact,” Voldemort stated and hissed a complex sounding string of spells in Parsel before stabbing his wand upward towards the apex of Azkaban’s defensive wards, the wave of magic causing the portkey wards to shatter in a brief but beautiful display of light. “Teach them about fear.”

“As you say, Dark One.” The Dementors surged forward eagerly and Voldemort gestured for his Death Eaters to portkey away. He paused to get a good look at the horror on the Order member’s faces when they saw the Dementors crossing the dark waters toward them and froze in terror of their situation. Dumbledore cast the first Patronus and the others shook themselves free of whatever memories the Dementors called up before they finally started firing off one Patronus after another. Looking directly towards Dumbledore, Voldemort aimed his wand upward once more and shouted out one word before portkeying home.

“Morsmordre!”

July 25th, Snape Manor

Sitting up with a sharp gasp, a green eyed teenager shuddered against a bitter chill that his blankets and a warming charm did nothing to allay. The oft ignored presence at the back of his consciousness returned as quickly as it had vanished and he sagged with the relief that only normalcy can inspire. Then he realized what had caused him to awaken so violently and the relief was tinged by confusion and regret.

“Tom was gone,” he mused and couldn’t decide if he liked that idea or not. “He’s never been gone before...” Shaking away the uneasy thoughts that followed on the tails of that internal revelation, Harry sighed and rubbed his arms briskly to banish the last of the gooseflesh.

“Tempus.”

Elsewhere in the house, Severus Snape woke with a sharp curse and rubbed his painfully throbbing forearm, dark eyes full of confusion as they stared into space. That wasn’t a summoning, he mused. That felt like before, almost fifteen years ago. The dull ache that was his constant reminder of his pledge returned less than a minute after the pain that had awakened him so rudely and he frowned into the darkness. What madness is the Dark Lord playing at now?

“One in the bloody morning.” Grumbling under his breath about inconsiderate Dark Lords, Harry lay back down and focused on the door that led to Tom’s mind. Knocking lightly in a vague show of courtesy, he opened the door and stepped through into a richly appointed study full of old, dark wood furniture and bookshelves full of equally antique looking tomes.

“Huh. That’s not exactly what I was expecting,” he muttered and reached out for a sense of how occupied his rival was at the current time. Shaking his head at Tom’s curtly delivered ‘busy, talk later’, Harry pulled over a piece of parchment and a quill so he could leave a note before returning to his own mind and the sleep that was pulling at his consciousness.

July 25th, # 12 Grimmauld Place

Looking around the large kitchen at Grimmauld Place, Albus Dumbledore felt very old for the first time that he could recall. He saw fear and defeat in the eyes of those who had just returned from the rout at Azkaban and saw worse things from those that accompanied him back to the prison an hour or two after their very narrow escape. If Voldemort hadn’t destroyed the anti-portkey wards, they might very well have all been Kissed before they could reach the opposite quay.

“Are we waiting on any others tonight, Alastor?”

“No, Albus, this is all that could make it.” Alastor Moody leaned against the wall in Snape’s usual spot and watched everything with his magical eye. “Might as well get started.”

“Indeed, I might as well.” Albus sighed and gathered his thoughts. “There was a raid on Azkaban tonight and Voldemort must have planned very well because, loath as I am to admit it, he scored a nearly flawless coup. Of the thirty aurors stationed to guard the prison, all but three are accounted for. We believe that the remaining three may have been taken prisoner for any information they might have. He now has the entirety of his Inner Circle at his disposal and he left the Island with twenty seven inmates in tow. They are presumed to be new recruits. All of the remaining prisoners and the aurors were subjected to the Kiss and left for dead outside Azkaban’s gates...so I must sadly assume that the rest of the Dementors have joined Voldemort...”

“How many are dead, Albus? Did we lose anyone we know?” Molly interjected, face wet with tears.

“Some of you may have known any number of the aurors, but I do not have their names at this time. We did lose one of our own number tonight. Hestia Jones was among the Aurors that were Kissed.” Rubbing at his eyes as much from exhaustion as grief, Albus shook his head. “Voldemort looked directly at me as we were attacked by the Dementors and only then did he cast the Mark and leave. We must find Harry. He is the key to victory and the brightest target for Voldemort to fixate on.”

“Old Voldy will recruit a lot more heavily now,” Moody stated. “He has his most experienced people back in the fold to get the newbies up to speed and, with his methods of motivation, I doubt it will take very long at all to get them where he wants them to be, so get your heads out of your arses, people! Yes, we took a terrible blow tonight, but he won’t wait for us to mourn. This is already worse than the majority of his attacks during the last War and he’s just getting warmed up.”

“What can we do?” Arthur asked. “Very few of us are seasoned fighters...we have very few Aurors and trained personnel. How are we going to win this if we can’t keep him from winning his objectives without any losses on his part?”

“We do need to improve our skills,” Albus admitted grudgingly. “But we must not stoop to the level of the Death Eaters. The moment we begin to kill as they do is the moment when all is lost. There are other ways to win that do not require the degree of force that Voldemort insists on using...”

“You go right ahead and keep thinking that way, Albus, old friend. I’ll be going about the business of killing me some Death Eaters so they can’t get back up and kill other people who didn’t deserve to die,” Moody stated bluntly. “They can’t enervate their comrades if they’ve been hit with the Avada Kedavra.”

“I won’t have such talk going on, Alastor,” Albus chided over the whispers Moody’s words had stirred up. “We simply have to try harder to keep them from doing more harm.”

More general murmuring rose up, some of it agreeing with Albus, some of it agreeing with Moody, and the meeting degenerated from there into a speculative discussion on the war and the future.

July 25th , Unplottable Location

Mood high, magic charged by the euphoric rush of a nearly flawless victory, Voldemort strode through the makeshift infirmary his Death Eaters had set up for the Inner Circle members and newest recruits alike. Nodding to those who were awake and aware, he continued his rounds until he felt the arrival of his loyal healers. Turning on his heel, he returned to the front of the ward and stood waiting for these, the most secretive of his Death Eaters. Of his entire amassed forces, his Healer’s identities were the most jealously protected.

Seeing Voldemort, the small group of Healers bowed respectfully to the Dark Lord.

“Are any critically injured, my Lord?” asked the eldest of the half dozen men and women.

“Not that I have been able to perceive, Master Healer. Please check everyone over and report to me on how soon everyone will be physically able to participate in the Initiations and the Revel that will follow,” Voldemort requested. “If you and your fellow healers deem them healthy enough, I would like to hold the events on the twenty-eighth or twenty-ninth.”

“As long as no one is in critical condition, I see no reason why they wouldn’t be ready to participate by the twenty-eighth or twenty-ninth, my Lord. I will report to you as soon as we have assessed the condition of all of our patients. How many are we tending to?”

“Eleven of my Inner Circle and thirty new recruits.” Voldemort smiled a little. He was most pleased by the outcome of the night’s events.

The healer’s eyes widened before his pleasure showed even behind the bronze mask he was wearing.

“A true coup, my Lord! We should be able to give you our report in no more than two hours.” The Master Healer stepped forward a little and bowed his head again before speaking in a whisper. “I have heard rumours that you were kissed by the Hive Leader, but he released your soul. If it pleases my lord, I would like to make sure you have suffered no ill effects...”

“I’ll be in my study. Attend me there once you have finished with your duties to your Brothers and Sisters.”

“It will be as you command, my Lord.” All six healers bowed again and bustled off to do their work.

Relaxing behind his desk, booted feet propped on its surface, Voldemort waited on the Healers to make their report and found the note Harry had left behind on his mental ‘desk’. Smirking at the very succinct statement, he sighed.

“Soon, we’ll talk soon,” he whispered into the empty room and was dozing lightly when the Master Healer knocked on his door.

Letting himself into the study when his Lord called, the Healer frowned behind his mask. He could hear and see how tired the powerful wizard was and that was unacceptable in his mind.

“Forgive me my boldness, M’lord, but I hope the gain far exceeded the cost of your interaction with the Dementors.”

Unfazed by the healer’s concern, Voldemort just shrugged and sat up properly under the man’s measuring gaze.

“The gain was great, Master Healer; both of the local Dementor Hives have now rallied to my battle standard and I gained a substantial number of useful new followers. What is your assessment of my Inner Circle and the new recruits?”

“All but the three Aurors are suffering from malnutrition and sleep deprivation,” the Healer began with a sour look. “They are all being given the option to speak with our Mind Healer and the physical damage can be cured with potions and rest.” He sat at a gesture from the Dark Lord. “Why bring the Aurors, m’lord? I had the Mind Healer check them over passively and at least one of them is gambling on his chances of escaping...”

“I knew I would have to kill at least one of the Aurors by the time the Initiations are over, so that comes as no surprise to me. Of the thirty newcomers, I expect to lose at least ten when they are faced with the reality of taking my Mark. Those that do submit to my rule will be nothing more than fodder, a shield, for those who have already proven their loyalty and worth.”

Relaxing visibly, the Healer nodded his agreement with Voldemort’s assessment of the recruit situation.

“That is what I had hoped you were intending,” he admitted and then shifted topics. “I would feel a lot better if all of your inner circle spoke with a Mind Healer at least once, m’lord. They were all under very heavy Dementor exposure for nearly a month...”

“For the new recruits and lesser Death Eaters, do what you feel is needed, but if my Inner Circle refuses you, let it drop. I will only command it if I see a reason to do so.”

Not entirely pleased with the ‘compromise’ Voldemort had delivered, the Healer nodded and resigned himself to it none the less. He would get no where by trying to argue with a stone wall.

“How do you feel, M’lord? May I run a health scan on your person?”

“Run your scan. I don’t feel any side effects beyond being tired.” Passively allowing the magic of the Healer’s scan to work past his reflexive defences, Voldemort smirked a little when the Healer still had to push more magic into the spell to make it work properly. “What are you expecting to find?”

“I’m checking to make sure the stability of your magical core is undisturbed as well as checking for physical damage,” the Healer mused and flickered his gaze back and forth as he ‘read’ the results of the scan. “Your core is stable and strong.”

Clearly relieved, he studied the rest of the information and prepared to offer his diagnosis.

“The Kiss appears to have depleted your physical resources far more deeply than your magical, which I would not have anticipated, but that does explain the tiredness. Please eat a small, high protein meal before you go to sleep, M’lord. That should be enough with a good night’s rest to replenish your physical reserves.”

“So otherwise, I am well.”

“Yes, m’lord. I will leave you to eat and rest and will report again later today.”

“I will see you then, Master Healer.” Voldemort waited until the man was gone, then magically locked his door and cast a parseltongue privacy spell. Returning to his core, he crossed the ‘study’ and went directly into Harry’s mind. “Wake up, my little Serpent.”

Aware of Tom the moment he appeared in his mind, Harry frowned and paused with his fork halfway to his mouth. Putting it down with a sigh, he turned his focus inward so he could find out what the older wizard had been up to and what else he might want to talk about.

Dobby watched his young master's eyes go distant as he descended into the Zen-like state the house elf had come to associate with deeper Occlumency work.

"You are being safe, Master Harry," he whispered nervously and set himself to guard the teen.

"Tom...you're tired. You could have gotten some sleep before coming to talk to me," Harry chastised gently.

"I'll have all day to sleep once we're done talking," Voldemort replied. "What was on your mind?"

"What happened to you early this morning? I felt you...go away." Harry pushed his uneasiness away again and focused on his visitor.

"You felt that?" Pushed off balance by that knowledge and the resurfacing memory of the event that had caused Harry's inquiry, Voldemort made a more active effort to push away the enveloping numbness that he had been trying to simply ignore by focusing extraneous issues like his own physical needs and the readiness of his followers. "The fireplace and chairs are new. When did you change it?"

"Seeing your study reminded me that there's no need to always sit on the floor." Harry eyed the older wizard and gestured to offer him a seat. He actually looked like he needed it. "Now, tell me what the bloody hell happened."

"I was Kissed by a Dementor." Saying it just seemed to make it all worse.

Hearing an unsteady undertone to the Dark Lord's tone that he had never expected to hear, Harry frowned and sat down across from him.

Studying Tom intently, he decided to continue with the rather blunt and direct tact he'd started on. The older wizard seemed to be fighting against something, but he couldn't tell for certain what it was.

"So your thing is to survive being Kissed like I survived the Killing Curse?"

"Not exactly, no..." Voldemort shifted restlessly. Just talking about what the Hive Master had done to him was bringing back that foreign urge to just give up the fight and part of him was grateful for the younger wizard's unrelenting attack on the subject while the rest of him wanted to curse him to make him shut up about it so he could enjoy the peace of surrender. "It let me go..."

"I can't imagine how that felt, but it must have been awful. Why aren't you pitching a fit about it? I certainly wouldn't be this quiet," Harry observed.

Laughing shakily, crimson eyes wild with a dozen conflicting emotions, Voldemort stood abruptly and began to pace. Movements unusually jerky, breathing sharp, he growled under his breath. Words tumbled out of his mouth and he couldn't seem to find the will to stop the flow any more than he could stop the small shudders that wracked his tall, lean frame.

"I let it kill me...it moved so fast and I didn't even understand what it was doing when it said it had to taste my truth until all of a sudden I could breathe again..." Shaking his head as if to deny the reality of what he had experienced, Voldemort rubbed goose fleshed arms and paced even more frantically.

"It was so easy to just give in, to surrender and not have to fight any more...I'd never felt that before...It felt so warm, so right..."

"You'll never stop fighting, Tom." If there was one thing Harry felt certain of, it was this wizard's indomitable will power. The only way he would stop fighting is if there was nothing left of him to fight with. "It's not in your nature to surrender. That's another trait we share."

"You sound so sure..." Voldemort's voice had gone soft with uncertainty and the looming wave of shock he was losing the battle against.

"The Dementor didn't intend to take your soul permanently or you would have felt the threat." Voldemort offered little or no response to his statement and Harry reacted on an instinctive level that he didn't quite understand. Flashing, angry green eyes met crimson and sought to convey his certainty through force of will alone. He snarled silently in an uncharacteristically open show of aggression. "Don't you dare give up now, Tom Riddle. Don't you dare give up before we've played this out to the bitter end!"

Staggered by the angry command in Harry's voice and by the push of powerful magic against his own, Voldemort shook himself free of the shock like state the Dementor's kiss had left him with. Staring back into blazing eyes the colour of his favourite curse, he nodded with his usual assertiveness and drew himself up tall once more.

Now that the haze was gone, the things he had been feeling revolted him, but he found that he could not push the memories from his mind completely. It was almost as if the Hive Master had slipped through every mental defence he had like a hot knife through butter and the mental compulsion it had used was a lingering thing that had required the resistance of himself and Harry to break free of it.

"Insolent brat," Voldemort snapped irritably.

"Bloody bastard," Harry retorted. "Feel better now?"

"I...yes, I do." Voldemort sighed explosively. "You are always a breath of fresh air, but today I think you decided to be a hurricane, my little serpent. You are no more allowed to give up than I am. Things have not even begun to get interesting between us."

"We'll have plenty of time for fights and duels, Tom. I'm looking forward to it, but I have to go now. Dobby is trying to get my attention for some reason."

“Go then and read about my coup,” Voldemort directed. “It should be in the Prophet by now.”

July 25th, Snape Manor

“I most likely will,” Harry said aloud as the other wizard vanished and he woke from his trance to the concerned gazes of Dobby, Remus and Severus.

“You most likely will what?” Severus drawled with a sharper edge to his tone.

“Read about Tom’s coup in the Daily Prophet. Is it here, yet?” Harry looked down at his plate and frowned. It had been nearly empty when he started his conversation with Tom and now it was full again. A glance at an unrepentant Dobby answered his question before he could even voice it. “I think he took Azkaban. Dementors are most common there, as I recall.”

“Exactly how often are you holding what appear to be polite and civil conversations with The Dark Lord?” Severus’ hands shook from the urge to throttle the younger wizard into some semblance of common sense when it came to dangerous people and things. “Are you going to invite him over for tea now?”

Remus coughed and stared at Severus like he’d lost his mind until Harry replied and the look broadened to include him in the werewolf’s assessment of his pack’s sanity.

“I talk with him occasionally, but the polite and civil part only developed since the possession at the Ministry,” Harry replied and dug into his fresh plate of breakfast. “Tea might not be a good idea. He’s not exactly a socially well adjusted person.” He looked over at Remus. “Flies, Moony. Did we get the Prophet this morning?”

“Huh? Oh, right...” Closing his mouth and opening the tightly rolled newspaper, Remus paled abruptly and shook his head. “Merlin help us...he scored a coup alright...”

Pulling the newspaper from the werewolf's unresisting hands, Harry focused on the front page as Severus stepped around the table to read over his shoulder.

AZKABAN FALLS TO HE WHO MUST NOT BE NAMED!

In a shocking attack all too reminiscent of His last rise to power, He Who Must Not Be Named stormed Azkaban Prison with an overwhelming force of Death Eaters just after Midnight last night.

Details are sketchy, but it is confirmed that dozens were left for dead on the boat docks, all the victims of the Dementor's Kiss. Rumours have it that He Who Must Not Be Named led the attack personally and Aurors in the force that responded to the alarms insist that it was the Monster himself who cast the Dark Mark over the bodies of the fallen, further denigrating their brave sacrifice.

All but three of the defending Aurors have been accounted for and thirty-eight inmates are currently considered missing as well. It is believed that all of that number has been taken prisoner by He Who Must Not Be Named and we fear that his intentions do not bode well for their survival.

Be prepared to defend yourselves and never leave your home without your wand ready and available for use! Avoid travelling alone! These are dark times and the monsters are growing ever bolder! We will faithfully provide more information as it becomes available to us.

More on the missing Aurors page 02

More on practical defence page 06

"So that's what happened," Harry mused to himself. "I see they're still refusing to acknowledge the 'Who's Who of Death Eaters' list we gave them at the Ministry."

"What are you talking about?" Severus shook himself and sat back down across from Remus. "What do you know about this attack, Harry?"

"I know that something very odd woke me around one this morning and I now know that Tom was Kissed by a Dementor and then released at that time." Harry put the paper down and sighed unhappily. "Tom didn't tell me everything and I doubt he will."

"The Dark Lord was Kissed? So that's what I felt..." Severus rubbed his forearm and echoed Harry's tired sigh, his obsidian gaze searching the younger man's eyes. "It's useless to ask you to stop talking to Him isn't it." His tone held only absolute certainty that he was correct in his assumption.

"He comes to me a lot more often than I go to him, so yes, it's pretty useless unless you can get him to stop initiating conversations," Harry stated in between bites of eggs, bangers and toast. "So far the majority of our talks have been centred around the importance of my studies, anyway."

Remus choked on his tea and sat there coughing for several long moments; his amber eyes stayed focused on his Cub's face while he tried to wrap his mind around the concept of Voldemort encouraging Harry to be more studious. He finally managed to croak out an incredulous statement.

"Your studies! Bloody hell..."

"Yeah, I know how you feel. It sounds really weird to say that Voldemort wants me to study so that our final duel will be more challenging, but that's what he seems to want," Harry admitted. "You okay over there, Moony?"

"I'm way too old and not nearly old enough for this," Remus whispered and beseeched Harry with his eyes. "Would you mind keeping us at least a little up to date on what you talk about with him? If we can stop just one raid..."

"I'll tell you if I find anything out, but I don't see the meetings and everything unless I want to anymore, so I'm not nearly as good of an early warning system as I was in fifth year. Even if it is after the fact, I'll still tell you, though. Who knows. That might still save a life or two."

Severus shook his head and slumped back in his chair, expression full of conflicting thoughts. "You can't do anything the easy way, can you, Harry? Not a bloody damn thing..."

July 26th, Snape Manor

"Remus?"

"Yes, Cub?"

"Did anyone ever wonder why I was so small and thin?" Emerald green eyes studied the greying werewolf with a deadly serious intensity.

"Of course we did, Harry. I did, Sirius did and I'm sure Severus did, though he wouldn't have asked given the compulsion he was under," Remus whispered, amber eyes dark with pain. "Albus assured Sirius and me that you were just small for your age...like Lily before she hit her maturity." He grimaced and shook his head. "When I persisted and pointed out that Lily wasn't that small, he sent me out on a lot of missions, especially after I was outed during your third year."

"Did you go on the missions?"

"No. Padfoot...we were hunting Wormtail to clear Siri's name." Remus swiped at his face angrily, as if the tears offended him. "Albus always did his best to keep us from you. Hedwig is the only owl that ever seemed to make it to us and back to you."

"Would you like to know what my childhood was like, what that manipulative old bastard made me live through for the greater fucking good?" Harry stared at Remus, gaze boring into him with an almost physical intensity. "The Dursley's starved me, y'know. They locked me in the cupboard under the stairs until my Hogwarts letter came. It was addressed to me in the cupboard under the bloody STAIRS!" Drawing in a deep breath, then slowly letting it out, Harry fought to calm down when things started rattling all around them.

"Dumbledore knew and he never did anything about it. No matter what I told him about the way I was treated, he forced me to go back

there and live with those muggles because of my Mother's blood, her sister, Aunt Petunia."

"But..." Remus paled noticeably. Could this get any worse? Was Albus really that manipulative? Oh, don't ask that...you know it's true...

"Your mother...Lily was adopted. Petunia isn't a blood relative..."

"Adopted...my mother was ADOPTED?" The glass in the windows all along the wall behind them shattered in a spectacular spray of glass as the young wizard's temper spiked, his eyes taking on a solid Avada Kedavra coloured glow of power. Harry hissed threateningly low in his throat. "Who were her parents? Did Dumbledore know about this, too?"

Remus jerked back from the fountain of sparkling glass fragments and stared at the windows as the house's restorative spells struggled to overcome the destructive nature of Harry's power so that they could fix the windows. "I don't know if Albus knew, but her birth certificate should be in the family vault, so we can check to see who her birth parents were," Remus whispered and swallowed carefully before continuing. "We'll find out, Cub. I promise." He quietly cast several Reparos on the windows and was thankful that the extra magic seemed to overcome the inertia, as the broken glass seemed to be the only damage to the home.

Seeing Remus casting charms to fix what he had broken snapped Harry out of his bitter anger and focused him on the room. Seeing the slowly mending glass, he relaxed and watched in awe as it suddenly seemed to leap back into the casings.

"Wow...did I break all of those..? I'm sorry...hearing that just made me too angry to think..."

"That's okay, Cub, but is it usually so difficult to fix what you break in a temper?"

"It's been worse for Dumbledore. There are things of his that he still hasn't fixed." Harry laughed a little and that broke the last of his hard

edged anger. He was still angry, but it wasn't the dangerous emotion it had been only moments before. "Of course that could be because Dobby helps them stay broken..."

"Dobby helps...oh, sweet Merlin, that's what he meant when he told me he had been helping Albus..." Remus groaned, then started to laugh and was joined by his Cub in a moment of shared merriment at the expense of another.

Considerably calmer after he had vented off a large quantity of excess magic through the shattering of a bunch of windows, Harry let his thoughts carry him into happier discussions. He would have plenty of time to stew over this newest revelation about Dumbledore's duplicity when his magic wasn't quite so tetchy...

"What all did you arrange with Gringotts for our wild Marauder's vacation, Moony? I meant to ask a few days ago, but I've been a little distracted."

Relieved to see that his Cub was willing to ease up and let their previous discussion go for now, Remus relaxed and smiled tentatively. Prior to Harry's display of intense, emotion driven accidental magic, he had been considering the possibility of talking with him about Padfoot...that didn't seem like such a bright idea at the moment.

"I arranged for Albus, the ministry crew as you have so aptly dubbed them, Amelia Bones and a few others to receive postcards and gifts from you or us, depending on your relationship with the recipient. I wanted to make sure that Amelia knew you were out of your own free will so we wouldn't have Aurors waiting on us at Kings Crossing. Not everything that Albus receives will be insulting to keep him from becoming too suspicious about your malleability and I made sure that Arthur would get at least one really neat muggle gadget. Griphook promised to send you a full list of what they will receive so you can react appropriately."

"That sounds good to me. Griphook is the best for getting things done. You seem to have gotten on with him alright."

Grinning at the memory of his first meeting with the current Potter Estate manager, Remus nodded and slouched back in his seat as his amber eyes brightened with amusement.

“He pinned me with the most ruthless stare I’ve ever seen on a goblin and read your letter with one eye on me the entire time. Bloody hell, Cub, I didn’t know goblins could do the ‘protective mother hen’ thing better than Molly Weasley...”

Blinking at the imagery those words created in his mind, Harry slid sideways on the sofa and groaned after several long minutes of laughing.

“Damn you, that hurts, but I needed a good laugh like that. What else happened?”

“Like you don’t already know,” Remus teased with just a touch of irritation when he saw the mischievous look in his Cub’s eyes. “Your goblin informed me that, as your godfathers, Severus and I should come directly to him for any business that relates to your accounts. You could have told us, Cub...hell...”

“You both have done so much for me and I know you care about me. That also seemed like the easiest way to explain our relationship to the goblins for now.” Harry arched an eyebrow at the werewolf as if to challenge him to disagree.

Remus almost rose to the bait and protested, but he could see Harry’s point and he just didn’t feel up to arguing when his Cub had that stubborn set to his jaw.

“I suppose so, though it still would have been nice to hear it from you beforehand...”

“It just came to me while I was writing the letter, Moony...I didn’t think beyond that. I’m sorry...” The younger wizard sighed and then grinned crookedly. “I do need you two to think about something for me. The rest of the Ministry crew has been seeing a Mind Healer and I think I need to go to at least one of the sessions. Besides the

obvious mess I have going on in my head, I need to know if I can really trust him with my friends...I'd like you two to go with me."

A relief like none other filled Remus when Harry made that one request. If his Cub was willing to see this Mind Healer on his own, then maybe some of these pressing emotional issues could be dealt with before they caused an explosion that neither he nor Severus could control.

"I'll talk to Severus about it. When do they meet with the Healer?"

"Every Monday and Wednesday."

"We'll get you there, Harry. I'll let you know for sure in the next day or so."

July 28th, Snape Manor

"Severus tells me that you have a 'trunk' full of Tom Riddle's old memories floating around up there in your head," Remus commented quietly. "Is that true?"

"It's not floating around loose like your statement implies, but yes, I do have what seems to be most of his memories from before he tried to kill me. Why?" Harry marked his place and closed the book on goblin language that he was currently re-reading. Giving his attention to his mentors, he arched an eyebrow in a very good imitation of Severus.

"We're just worried, Harry." Severus paced in a vain attempt to hide his discomfort over the subject matter and paused only long enough to meet Harry's gaze so he could properly convey his concern. "So much of what he knew then was incredibly dangerous for anyone to know, himself included. Look where it got him."

Harry sighed expressively and muttered under his breath in Gobblely.

"What was that, Harry? I do believe I just heard you speak goblin." Remus had just enough of a grasp on the goblin language to know it

when he heard it and that had most definitely not been Latin or parseltongue. "When did you learn Gobblely?"

Gesturing to the large tome he still held in his lap, Harry grinned crookedly.

"I told you I had the goblin books written by my ancestor. This one is strictly devoted to the language. I'm re-reading it to make sure everything stuck in my head."

"Really? Say whatever you said again, please. It's been a while, but I might understand what it was if you didn't mumble," Severus stated and earned himself a green glare. "Well?"

"Fine," Harry growled and sounded very goblin-like. The irritation that was fuelling his tone made his eyes flash a brighter green as he spoke in the growling, rough language of the goblins. "Ar huur mel shuuraur dunn alkuugal'dekhec dac akukaan A muul. Gharthaan mel ac ogech rharar duun." He gave both men a tooth filled smile that would have made Griphook proud. "Did you catch that?"

"Brat," Severus grumbled, his eyes widening as his mind translated part of what he had heard. "I caught the 'evil bastard' part. What else did you say? Please? I'm curious..."

"I said that it got him closer to immortality than anyone else I know. Made him an evil bastard, too," the younger wizard translated with a sigh, his pique gone as fast as it had come into being. "Although, honestly, the Dark magic didn't have to make him that way entirely on its own; it had help. He was already so...dark at such a young age. The one memory I accidentally viewed...Merlin." Harry shuddered, but not entirely from revulsion.

"You don't have to talk about it if it was that awful, Cub." Remus carefully brushed Harry's unruly fringe back so he could see his eyes. What he saw drew him up short and it was Severus who replied to his unspoken question.

“Parts of it were awful, but part of it was also very much to your liking, wasn’t it.” Severus knew the truth of it without receiving an answer. He could see it in Harry’s eyes.

“It scared me half to death at first,” Harry breathed, eyes going distant as he allowed himself to remember yet again. “I got sucked into one of his memories and it felt like I was him. This bully and a bunch of his hangers on were after him and they made a point of telling the ‘freak’ that the house mother was too drunk to be able to help him that time.”

Harry’s tone and expression shifted subtly and his eyes filled with a deep satisfaction. “We kicked the bully when he rushed in on us...we kicked him until he stopped moving and couldn’t beg us for mercy any more...blood was coming out of his mouth...” Harry smirked maliciously, then froze and blinked as if coming out of a dream. A dark red flush crept up his neck and he swallowed convulsively. “My mind replaced the bully in Tom’s memory with Dudley and Piers...believe me when I tell you that I know exactly how dangerous these memories are for me.”

“Will you please let me show you how to get rid of them now?” Severus tried to keep the fear and unease out of his voice and failed miserably. That smirk...it was an expression he was all too painfully familiar with. “Please, Harry...”

The green eyed teen shook his head and slowly recovered his composure after having shown both men what was, in his opinion, far more than they needed to know about the turmoil he was sorting out in his head. Seeing Severus so upset and worried for his safety made him forgive the older man a little bit more, though. Severus really did care and he was trying so very hard to make amends for his previous mistreatment.

“Getting rid of the memories isn’t going to help me,” Harry whispered. “There is simply too much pure knowledge in there that could save my life. Once I’ve settled down after my Maturity, I’m going to take another look through whatever is in the trunk and I’d like to have you two and Dobby there when I do it so I have someone to help me

through the rough spots. I was stupid and unprepared to deal with the first one..."

"We'll do everything we can for you, Cub. You know that," Remus stated and squeezed Severus' shoulder comfortingly. "How are you really feeling now that you're away from the Dursleys?"

"Much better," Harry stated emphatically and smiled with far more happiness than either man had seen from him in all the years they had known him. "Now that I'm getting past the fact that they were just one more lie to keep me in line, I feel a lot better knowing they're not my blood relatives. I never could understand how my mother came from the same family as Petunia. Mom was so beautiful..."

"And Petunia looks like she's related more closely to a horse than a human being," Remus quipped with a wolfish grin. "Yes, I do understand."

"You're not the only one," Severus muttered with a mild shudder.

"So, enough of all that depressing stuff," Harry declared with a crooked grin. "Would either or both of you like to borrow my goblin books as I finish them? I'm done with the first four and they're quite informative. I'll be another day or two on this one, but after that you can dig into it, too."

"Only a day or two? How far along are you in that one?" Eyeing the large tome that Harry held in his lap, Severus whistled softly when the younger Wizard opened the book to a point around a third through it. "I will be impressed if you finish that in a week and I believe Miss Granger may pass out when she finds out how much studying you've been doing."

"The books all have a minor enhancement spell on the cover that can only be read by an Evans descendent. They increase things like reading speed and comprehension, or so Griphook tells me." Harry grinned and shrugged. "As for 'Mione, she already knows about my Library. I had to promise to pass some of the books along to her just to keep her from threatening bodily harm."

“That sounds like Hermione.” Remus arched an eyebrow at Severus when his schoolmate smirked at him and shook his head. “What?”

“Hermione?” Severus drawled, black eyes full of amusement.

“I’m not her teacher anymore, you old bat,” the last of the Marauders declared with a smirk. “I get to be on a first name basis with all of the pretty girls.” Remus blushed abruptly and darted a glance at Harry before stammering out a retraction on his statement. “Um...I didn’t mean that the way it came out...oh, bloody hell, don’t look at me like that, Harry...you look just like your mother when she was going to get someone good...”

“I actually think you were channelling Sirius there for a minute,” Harry commented with a laugh. “Don’t worry about it, Moony. We’ll keep your lust for Hermione a secret. Won’t we, Severus?”

Sputtering, caught between laughter at the look on Remus’ face and indignation over the whole conversation, the Slytherin settled for simply staring at Harry with obvious confusion. He finally found his voice after several long minutes of trying to figure out how serious the teen was being. “Do not even consider putting me in the middle of your prankster shenanigans, Mr. Potter,” he finally managed, ears as red as Remus’ face.

“I don’t...you wouldn’t tell her that...Cub...”

Sniggering, Harry just shook his head and sighed.

“You do know what a joke is, right?”

July 29th, Unplottable Location

Anticipation building to a fever pitch, Voldemort strode down into the dungeons and paused briefly at the door to each cell, his crimson gaze measuring the merits and value of each captive.

“Such a sweet blend of power,” he mused, voice nearly lapsing into the sibilance of parseltongue as he observed the small group of relatively pretty young women that resided in one of the last cells. “So

perfectly frightened...” Laughing to himself, he moved on to peek into the last few cells and completed his ‘inventory inspection’ in even higher spirits than when he had entered the lower levels of his Manor.

Lounging with regal grace on a chaise that was located in a private study that he was sharing with the rest of his fellow Inner Circle members, Lucius sighed and struggled to contain his anxiety. He both loved and craved the power boost offered by the Revels, but the looming threat of his Lord’s displeasure had all but spoiled the excitement for him.

“Oh, for fucks sake, Lucius!” Bellatrix growled at the silver haired wizard with a look of complete disdain that lost some of its bite because of her obvious understanding of his mood. “Just offer yourself at his feet tonight and get it over with. If he doesn’t ignore you completely, then he’ll make you scream for a mercy you know he’ll never offer and you’ll feel better about having failed Him because he finally punished you...”

“The voice of experience,” Lucius drawled and smirked at the only female to ever be powerful and dangerous enough to make her way to the top of the Death Eater ranks. “Wormtail told us all about your screams for mercy.” He taunted and then snorted with all of the pure blood pride he could find within himself at that moment. “I know better than to believe his drivel. You never scream for mercy, Bellatrix. You scream for more.”

“Now who is the voice of experience,” Rodolphus asked with a chuckle that threatened to turn into full blown laughter when Lucius turned a haughty, cold sneer in his direction.

Bellatrix shrugged to let Lucius know she didn’t care that he knew this about her before fixing her chuckling husband and brother-in-law with a cold, vicious stare of her own.

“Laugh, and after the Revel, when we all go to him to be punished for our failure at the Ministry, I will savour your screams the most. You do not truly feel your failure as we do, or you would welcome it with far more eagerness.”

Sobering, Rodolphus glared back at his wife, but it lacked the wintry bite of her gaze.

"I accept any punishment my Lord sees fit to administer, but I do not lust after the pain like you two do. You're both practically whores for the pain he gives out."

Rabastan stared at his brother in silent disbelief before Macnair and Dolohov's laughter cut through his daze.

"What are you going on about? I remember how you used to be, Brother...the pot shouldn't speak ill of the kettle, you know," the younger Lestrangle brother chided Rodolphus.

"You have clearly spent too much time in Azkaban, Rodolphus. You have lost part of your memory," Antonin Dolohov stated. "I recall there not being one of us who didn't feel at least some amount of yearning for the next Crucio."

Seeing nothing but mute agreement from Macnair, Mulciber and Avery, Rodolphus growled and stormed out of the room in a roil of angry energy.

"Well, I'd say that went well, all things considered," Vincent Crabbe, Sr. mused and chuckled wryly. "Perhaps you should take Bellatrix's advice, Lucius. The Dark Lord has been in very high spirits since the raid. Laying yourself at his feet might very well see you punished tonight, but at least then it will be done and you will be able to think past it to what needs to be done next."

"I may well do that. It is the waiting for the blow to fall that drives me to the edge of insanity." Lucius eyed Rabastan curiously when he grinned. "You disagree?"

"No, I fully agree. My reasoning may be different than your own, but I can understand the motivation." Sighing, Rabastan stood and stretched. "I'll go fetch my brother before he does something rash, like ruining our Lord's good temper before we even have a chance to enjoy the Revel."

"You're a good man, Rab," Macnair stated. "Good luck on that."

Bellatrix shook her head, dark blue eyes focused on the silver fox that was lounged so gracefully across from her.

"How do you do it, Lucius? How do you manage to keep your wife happy when you are so thoroughly bound to His will?"

"I would assume in a manner similar to how you manage to keep your husband happy while being equally bound to our Lord's will," Lucius stated. "Why should I have difficulty handling both?"

Vincent threw his hands up in the air and went to find a book or something to occupy his attention while the pair bantered back and forth. This could go on all evening.

"I'm not sure I even want to know how she keeps Rodolphus happy," he declared. "Our Lord doesn't put the same demands on me or Gregory that he does on you two. It's easier to live a happy life at home when that is the case, I suppose."

"I'm sure it is," Bellatrix mused wistfully and then gave voice to a wild laugh. "I married who I was forced to marry, and I feel absolutely no need to make him happy at home, or anywhere else for that matter."

"It's easier for men when it comes to an arranged marriage, I suppose. Narcissa was chosen for me by my Father, so I married her," Lucius admitted with a gaelic shrug. "She gave me my son and heir, and that is really all I ever expected of her."

"Ah, the truth will out." Bellatrix grinned wickedly. "How long has your marriage bed lain cold? Since the conception of your son was confirmed? That wouldn't surprise me one bit. My sister is a cold and practical bitch, but damned if I don't love her all the same." She cackled when Lucius' face closed down into an unreadable mask.

"Crazy bitch," Lucius stated in a cold and emotionless voice. "Why would you even care to know?"

"We are alike, Lucius, more alike than I ever knew. Our bodies may be married to another but our hearts and souls belong only to Him." Bellatrix glared at the Malfoy patriarch. "Don't even try to deny it."

July 29th, St. Mungo's, Office of Master Mind Healer Octavius Monroe

"Is this a private party or can anyone join in?"

Conversation stopped and six pairs of eyes focused on the three cloaked and hooded figures that currently stood blocking the doorway to the Mind Healer's office. Hermione frowned and then recognition drove the suspicion from her eyes.

"Harry!" She stood and practically leapt at the young man when she saw bright green eyes through the shadows of the hood. Knocking his hood back in her zeal, she basked in the deep sense of security she felt when his arms enfolded her in a strong hug. "I missed you," she whispered into his neck.

"I missed you, too, 'Mione." Harry enjoyed the closeness of their hug for a long moment, then squeezed her gently and slowly let go. Smiling, he smoothed away her tears and turned to catch Ginny when she did, indeed, leap at him with a happy outcry. Laughing, he held the younger girl while she squeezed him fiercely.

"Breathe...need to breathe, Gin..."

"Oh, Harry, you look so healthy!" Ginny declared and eased her grip, brown eyes widening with surprise when she saw how much better he did look.

"Hi, Harry." Luna smiled knowingly and relaxed into a hug that was interrupted by Ron's vigorous smack to his best mate's back. She giggled. "Careful, Ronald. He might return the favour."

Ignoring Luna's comment, Ron grinned at Harry.

"Harry, mate! It's good to see you." Ron beamed and gave the shorter teen a one armed hug.

"It's good to see you, too, Ron. How are you doing, Neville? You look like you're feeling better about things." Harry smiled a greeting to the boy who could have had his life and was suddenly not so upset by the way things had turned out. He couldn't wish his life on quiet, gentle Neville no matter how often he might rail against what fate had done to him.

"I'm doing a lot better, Harry. The quiet one behind the desk is Healer Monroe, by the way." The up and coming Herbalist grinned when Hermione blushed over their bad manners. "Who'd you bring? Bodyguards?"

"Privacy spell," Harry requested seemingly out of the blue and waited until Severus' spell had settled over the room before he relaxed completely and turned his full attention to Octavius. "Mind Healer Octavius Monroe, it's a pleasure to finally meet you after everything this rowdy crew has told me about you." Harry offered his hand in greeting. "My two shadows are Remus Lupin and Severus Snape." He shook the healer's hand and grinned crookedly. "I'm Harry Potter."

"It truly is an honour, Mr. Potter. I was hoping you would be able to join us." Surprised by the teens grip, the Mind Healer blinked. "Please, have a seat everyone. Will you be joining us as well, Mr. Lupin, Mr. Snape?"

"Why's Professor Snape here with you, Harry?" Ron sounded resentful and the look on his face confirmed it. "Hey, Professor Lupin."

"You guys weren't the only ones who had your minds tampered with," Harry commented, tone slightly chiding. "I have a feeling it was far more extensively done for Remus and Severus."

"Are you absolutely certain of this, Mr. Potter?" The young wizard now had his undivided attention.

"Completely." Harry smiled appreciatively when Remus conjured chairs for the three of them. Settling in the comfortable seat, he focused most of his attention on Octavius. "You were very intently

focused while I was saying hello to my friends. Did you observe anything useful?"

"Healer Monroe does that to us all the time," Ginny commented. "He lets us talk and tells us things we need to work on just from seeing how we act."

"The most obvious thing that I was able to see is that you love your friends dearly, Mr. Potter. I believe you would do almost anything, including endangering yourself, to protect them. They have told me this about you, but today I saw it in your eyes. I'm not sure what condition I would be in right now if you had decided I was a threat to their well being."

Surprised by the man's very astute assessment of his intentions, Harry decided he really needed to work on a 'slytherin mask' to keep other people from doing the same. "Either you're very observant or I'm easy to read," Harry commented. "I don't think many people catch on to my expressions with that degree of accuracy in such a short space of time."

"I'm trained to read people, Mr. Potter and I can assure you that you are in no way easy to read based solely on visual cues." The younger man relaxed some and Octavius let out the breath that he had been holding. He hadn't felt so much power contained in one individual in many years and it was nerve wracking to think that the wielder of that power was a not-quite sixteen year old boy.

"Moony, Professor Snape, this is a surprise." Ginny grinned and whispered at the older men in a conspiratorial tone so she wouldn't interrupt the conversation between Harry and the Mind Healer. "Especially since the Order is out looking for Remus and Harry..."

"Ah, yes, that..." Remus chuckled. "We had to distract them somehow."

"Indeed," Severus drawled. "It is good to see all of you, as well, but if you tell any of your little friends that I said that, I will deny it to my grave." He smirked. "Now, pay attention to Mr. Potter. He's the attention seeking brat, remember?"

“Sure I am.” Harry stuck his nose in the air and imitated Gilderoy Lockhart’s tone of voice almost perfectly. “Who else would they pay attention to now that I’m here?”

Octavius coughed and then started laughing. He hated Lockhart with a passion and seeing this personable young man poking fun at him was too rich for words.

“Oh, bravo! If you were a blonde, I’d have been worried.”

Hermione waited until the general laughter spawned by that comment had died down before speaking up again, her dark brown eyes full of concern for her best friend.

“How are you really, Harry?” She met his gaze and silently demanded an honest answer. He was ‘just caught the snitch from under Draco’s nose while the slytherin prince watched’ happy and she couldn’t think of a reason for his mood to be this high.

“Really?” Harry smiled warmly. “I’m feeling great right now and most of the time I’m doing pretty well. It’s been rocky off and on for the last few weeks. How about you guys?”

“Great, not a scripted ‘I’m fine’? Wow,” Neville teased. “I think we’re all doing pretty close to great ourselves.”

“What he said,” Ron seconded.

“What’s your opinion, Healer Monroe?” Harry asked, tone inquisitive and guileless.

Octavius arched an eyebrow at The Boy Who Lived and chuckled.

“There’s no need to play the ‘Gryffindor Golden Boy’, Mr. Potter. Yes, your friends have told me of your reputation at school. In my expert opinion, they are healing quickly. I am pleased to say that they will not be needing me for very much longer.”

“That’s good news. So, can you tell me if I am still under any unwelcome spells? I know that Ron explained the manifestation of my core to you.”

“Direct and to the point. Yes, I can check for all sorts of spells including Obliviation, suppression and many more, but I need your permission to cast the spell on you.”

“You have my permission,” Harry murmured and forced himself to relax when the Mind Healer drew his wand.

Rising up out of his seat so that no one – namely Remus and Severus – could mistake his intentions, Octavius cast the complex revealing spell and directed his wand at the ever present stack of parchment on his desk.

“If I recall what Mr. Weasley told me, this could take a few minutes. Miss Granger seems to be itching to ask you something.” The Healer grinned at the exuberant young witch.

“What’s up ‘Mione? You look fit to burst,” Harry teased gently.

“Please don’t take this wrong because I am so glad to see you happy, but it just keeps nagging at me and won’t let go. Why are you so...irrepressibly happy? Even at the best of times, this just isn’t like you.” Hermione bit her lower lip and tilted her head to one side as if to gauge his reaction.

“You really are the smartest witch of our age,” Harry complimented. “I haven’t checked directly in case he’s up to something I don’t want to know about, but when Tom is especially happy, it elevates my mood a good deal as well.”

“Does it affect your ability to get angry or upset?” Octavius asked in a carefully neutral tone. He hadn’t realized the bond was this tight.

“Not really, no,” Harry mused. “My moods have always changed quickly and easily and I haven’t noticed a change in that recently other than the fact that I have a hell of a lot more to be pissed off

about.” He turned and pinned the small group of teens with his gaze. “Have you been practicing your Occlumency?”

“Yes, Slave Driver, we have,” Ginny replied tartly. “Some of us had doctor’s orders, y’know.”

“Some but not all of you. I knew Hermione would dive into it the moment she got the book I had been using, but I wasn’t sure if you were all studying,” Harry commented.

“Of course we’re all studying,” Hermione replied in a tone that said she had been pushing the issue with her usual fanatic devotion to learning. “Ginny and I practice at night before we go to sleep and we all work on it when we can.”

“Only when you can?” Harry frowned.

“We study as a group as often as we can, you ninny!” Ginny laughed.

“Oh...” Harry shrugged and blushed a little. “Sorry.”

Delighted by the interactions between the six teens, Octavius shared a knowing look with the other two adults before checking to see if the spell had run its course.

“Let’s see what we have here...” Unable to hide his deepening frown, Octavius looked through the small stack of parchment and was torn between horror and a rapidly growing respect for Harry. “There is the residue of a recently failed Obliviation. Were you aware of it?”

“I know who did it and when it occurred,” Harry replied and sank into a sudden, almost unnatural stillness. “I will eventually discuss the event privately with that person.”

“Ah, well, alright...” The Mind Healer swallowed carefully before continuing. The young man’s shifting demeanour was keeping him off balance and it wasn’t a sensation he was accustomed to feeling around a patient. “There are also the ghost impressions of behavioural modification, heritage suppression, another Obliviation that failed and there’s...” He looked up, only to find himself captured

by a pair of Avada Kedavra green eyes that resembled a snake's with their expression of cool indifference.

"There's a fully active soul bond that both of us are aware of," Harry murmured.

"Is this the curse bond that was intimated by your friends?"

"Yes, it is. What's bothering you about it?" Harry sat up out of his slouched posture and leaned forward, demeanour shifting again to a much more commanding presence. "Tell me."

Shocked by the power that laced those two words, Octavius relented to the spoken and unspoken commands in Harry's voice and told him everything instead of the condensed version he had planned on using.

"Curse bonds are rare in the extreme and are notoriously known for being unhealthy, damaging connections that can be quite painful for both parties...If I had absolutely no background information on your case, I would have assumed you had a twin."

"You're not going to assume I'm in love?" Harry asked bitterly. "Isn't that what most people assume about soul bonds? Most of what 'Mione could find tended to lean in that direction."

"In most cases, a soul bond is indicative of intense emotion between two individuals, most commonly love, but I meant exactly what I said originally," Octavius stated. "Twin bonds look different than a purely emotional bond. The sharing is usually a lot more intense and can include everything that the pair does while not together physically." He looked over the last parchment more closely and then refocused on Harry. "Did something happen recently that caused the bond to change?"

"He possessed me," Harry replied in a very flat tone. "It stopped hurting right after that. That threw me for a loop for a while since I hadn't really been aware of how much pain I'd been feeling since I was a toddler until it suddenly disappeared."

“And he pointed out the spells that bound you soon after that event, correct?”

“Yes. Why is that significant?”

“It’s possible that it was merely a defensive reaction. Weakness for one weakens both in theory,” the Mind Healer replied. “He may also have felt...stifled due to all of the bindings you were under. You couldn’t feel it clearly enough to act because you had lived with it for years, so he took action before it could become a mutual problem.”

“Fred and George have a really intense twin bond,” Ron interjected. “Mind Speak and everything. You don’t talk to snake face, y’know, in your head like they do...do you, mate?”

Harry smiled a secretive little smile and kept his mouth firmly shut.

“Why won’t you answer me?” Ron demanded.

“Because you really won’t like the answer and I don’t feel like fighting with anyone today,” Harry replied matter of factly. “Just the idea of it is enough to scare you, so why make it worse?”

“Oh, Harry...” Hermione knew him well enough to hear what he hadn’t said and to understand that the answer to Ron’s question was yes. “You look rested. No bad dreams?”

“No visions and no really bad nightmares.” The green eyed teen grinned crookedly. “I’m a lot happier away from the Dursleys and Moony and Severus have helped me through a lot already.”

“Speaking of...Mr. Lupin, Mr. Snape...Would you object to my casting the same revealing spell on you gentlemen that I cast on Mr. Potter? If there are any remaining spells, I may be able to help with the removal as well as any issues that are bothering due to the...intrusive nature of this person’s spell casting.” Octavius smiled a little. “I would very much like to be able to work with the three of you like I have had the pleasure of doing with Mr. Potter’s friends.”

"It would probably be a good idea to have you do that, but I would rather do it at another time." Severus shrugged. "It's nothing personal, but no one really knows where Harry is right now, and I'd like to keep it that way..."

"You're right, Severus. Harry?" Remus nudged the happily chatting teen. "I hate to do this to you, but..."

"We need to go? I figured we wouldn't be able to stay more than an hour or so." Harry hugged all three girls firmly and exchanged back slaps or one armed hugs with Ron and Neville. "I'll arrange for you guys to visit once my maturity is over." He turned to Octavius and grinned crookedly. "It was great meeting you. Next time I'm here I'd like for you to take a look at a few things with me...I hope it'll help..."

"I'll do everything I can, Mr. Potter. You three be careful and I will see you again as soon as you are able." The three men pulled up their hoods and slipped out of his office as quietly as they had arrived. "Well, if that wasn't interesting, I don't know what is..."

Hermione laughed a little and shook her head.

"You haven't seen anything yet," she promised.

July 29th, Snape Manor

Ducking under a severely overpowered wandless reducto before sidestepping a stupefy that barely had enough 'juice' to make it to him, the Slytherin Head of House snarled and stowed his wand in its wrist sheath with a graceful flick of his wrist. He couldn't tell if Harry was aware of his fluctuating power, but by damn, he'd make sure he noticed before it got him hurt.

"What is your problem today, Potter?" Severus growled at the younger wizard. "One spell will be strong enough to demolish a building and the next five are barely strong enough to warrant my attention let alone a shield charm. If you aren't going to make an effort to concentrate, then I am not going to waste my time!"

Narrowing his green eyes irritably, Harry snarled back and raised his wand to cast. Before the words could even leave his mouth, his hand jerked and he let out a sharp cry of pain as the smell of overly hot enamel and not quite burned skin hit the noses of his mentors. More like tormentors, he growled silently and immediately retracted the angry thought.

“Fucking hell! Ow, that hurt!” Shaking his hand, Harry glared down at the slender red wand as if had deliberately done him harm. “The ruddy thing jerked around in my hand and went red hot...it’s not damaged, is it?” The anger vanished and concern flooded his voice as he realized that he might have forced himself into finding another wand when he had just begun to truly enjoy how this one felt. “I don’t want to have to get another wand...this one likes me and I like it, too...”

“Cross that bridge when you get to it,” Remus urged and cast a mild healing spell on his Cub’s hand. “It didn’t burn you too badly, but I’d say you need to give the wand a rest for a while. It is a beauty and it would be a pity to damage it beyond repair. Why don’t we work on your wandless magic instead?”

“Why did it jerk and get hot like that?” Harry looked from Remus to Severus and back again, eyes full of a thousand questions. “What’s happening now?”

“Your magic is fluctuating badly,” Severus explained in a tone that was the direct opposite of the one he had used only minutes prior. “I thought as much but I wanted to be sure and provoking you seemed like the easiest way to test out my theory.” He had the grace to look apologetic. “I did not anticipate such a violent magical surge or I would have taken a different tact...”

“In other words, you decided to take a note from your potions classes and opted to ‘motivate’ me to do better by telling me how awful I was doing?”

“That is not how I intended it...on the contrary,” Severus murmured with a barely noticeable flinch; that comment had scored a direct hit whether he wanted to admit it or not. “I wanted you to be aware of the

fluctuations on a more conscious level...but I chose a less than friendly way to point out the problem..."

"Snarky bastard," Harry grumbled and shoved the older man playfully. When he staggered a little bit to one side, the teenager froze in surprised silence. "I know I didn't push that hard. Are you okay, Severus?"

"You pushed a lot harder than I think you realize and yes, I am quite alright," Severus replied with a small smile of his own. "I just wasn't prepared for a 'playful shove' like Moony here used to do when he was younger...I suggest that we stop all practical exercises related to magic and hand to hand training until after your body has settled down from your Maturity. We can still study potions and whatever theory you like, if that is acceptable to both of you?"

"Yeah, I'm fine with that." Harry shook his head and picked up his wand with a dejected sounding sigh. "Just when I was getting into the groove of really duelling, too..."

"Cub..." Remus caught a mischievous look from Harry and burst out laughing. "Imp. Stop playing the ham and try to be somewhat serious for a moment. How are you feeling about all these changes that you're going through? It's been going on for nearly a month now and I'm concerned that you're not handling everything as well as you appear to be doing."

"I am handling everything as well as I can with what little information I have on my...situation. The book that Dobby snatched from Malfoy's library explained about all kinds of blood heritages that might have led someone like Dumbledore to use suppression charms on unsuspecting people...it went into great detail about how some wizarding families have Elven, Veela, Vampire, Demon and even Dragon bloodlines in their history and what the typical expression of traits might be...This would all be a lot more helpful if I knew my own lineage."

"What part of your lineage are you questioning, Harry?" Severus arched an eyebrow at the younger wizard and smiled a little.

“All of it,” Harry stated bluntly. “I don’t know anything about my parent’s bloodlines and it’s looking like Mom was a pureblood of the Evans wizarding line, not the Muggle line. I don’t know what that means for me in terms of inheritance or anything else. Sure, I’ve read up on the legal aspects but that doesn’t explain anything about the magical aspect of it.” He eyed both men and echoed Severus’ arched eyebrow.

“I understand that Mom did something...that you all did something to protect me, but I still don’t know what that was.”

“Look, Cub, we can pull out the Pensive and show you the ritual and try to explain everything in depth now if you like. Personally, I’d rather not find out what would happen to you and or us if something caused an emotionally driven bout of accidental magic while we were in the spell the Pensive uses...” Remus trailed off and shook himself before conjuring seating for the three of them. “We can give you the basic overview for now, though, if that’s all right with you?”

Deciding that Remus might have a very painfully valid point, Harry nodded and let that point go. As much as he wanted to know everything, now might not be the best time.

“That’s fine. I wouldn’t want to find out what would happen in that situation either. You promise to tell me everything once I’ve settled down after my maturity, though, right?”

“Absolutely, Cub. You have a right to know, but your magic is so volatile right now...” Remus sighed.

“I understand, Moony.” Harry grinned weakly and gestured for them to continue.

Severus caught Remus’ eye and waited until they were all settled before speaking up.

“Your parents received a ritual from Albus shortly after they were told about the prophecy. Lily researched it and did not like what she found, so she found a ritual that she believed would protect all of us, and

you above all. Unfortunately, even then, things that involved you rarely went according to plan...”

“We set out to perform the ritual that Lily chose and wound up doing something else entirely,” Remus stated as calmly as he could, amber eyes bright with the memory of how powerful the ‘guiding’ entity had felt as it moved through them and bound them to a fate that he was still occasionally uncertain of. “Something interfered with the ritual and changed it...you’ll understand when you see our memories of it in the Pensive.”

“What sort of something?” Harry sat forward eagerly.

“Hecate,” Severus replied with a smirk. “Not being the sort to worship the old gods and goddesses, I’m not sure how much I agree with that assessment. Lily believed it, however, and I wasn’t about to argue with her...” He grinned at Remus and the two shared a nostalgic moment.

“In other words, I inherited my temper and stubbornness honestly?” Harry grinned wickedly. He tended to soak up every tiny bit of information he could get on his parents and this was even better than usual because he had a slow but steady flow of nostalgic interactions to watch and memories to squirrel away.

“That’s one way of putting it. So, this ritual bound your parents, Sirius, Severus and myself to you in such a way that...well, to me it translated out to ‘pack’, and I guess for the rest of us it equalled out to family.” Remus smiled warmly.

“So, could I have inherited traits from the Black, Snape, Evans, Lupin and Potter lines?”

“That is possible, but we don’t know for sure. James had quick reflexes but nothing like yours, so it is looking like you may have gotten heightened reflexes, speed and possibly strength from me. You could think of it as having the benefits of being a werewolf without the curse, I suppose.” Remus shrugged and ruffled Harry’s hair playfully.

"Add Prince to your list," Severus commented. "She was the last child of the Prince line, minor though it was. I don't know if there were any gifts or anything to be inherited, but it can't hurt to consider the possibility."

"Okay...what about Sirius? Some of the other Gryffs are always joking about how this supposedly pureblood family or another needs to look a little closer at their woodpile for creature blood." Harry tilted his head to one side and grinned wickedly.

"I'm convinced that the Malfoy's are part Veela. I mean, look at them. White blonde hair like Fleur and the Veela that were at the World Cup, silver to grey-blue eyes...there has to be Veela in there somewhere. According to the book, male descendents mostly act as carriers for the Veela bloodlines, but it glossed over what the not so mostly part was. I'm guessing it's possible that, if Draco lives long enough to have a daughter, she could manifest like a pure-blooded Veela."

"Assuming you are correct, that is possible," Severus mused. "I can't fault your logic. It is something many of us wondered about for years and Lucius is very careful to steer the conversation away to other things when someone is bold enough to ask outright."

"What did you find out about the other non-human bloodlines?" Remus could contain his curiosity no longer. Harry had been rather possessive of that particular book and he wanted to know what the hell was in it! "Tell me since you won't let me borrow it..."

"Well, vampire descendents tend to have an affinity for necromancy and the dead, or so the book says. They also tend to be harder to turn into a vampire for some reason," the green eyed teen mused. "There isn't much beyond supposition on the old blood Elves. It's mostly a debate on whether or not they were real or are just a myth. The demon stuff is pretty scary, actually. It starts out tamely enough with the children of Incubi and Succubi and keeps getting worse and worse..." He shuddered and rubbed his arms. "I stopped when I read about the case where the spawn of a Balrog ate its way out of the Mother and proceeded to destroy the house...that was pretty gruesome."

Severus blinked and shook his head. What sort of books had Lucius been hiding from him for all of these years?

“And your elf managed to take this book from the Malfoy library? Something like this would be very well hidden normally. I don’t see the Ministry liking the subject matter...”

“That’s where he said he got it. You were there when he dropped it in my lap.” Harry frowned and tried to remember what the book had said about dragons. “Dobby...”

Popping in, the elf grinned at the two older wizards and sat the book in question on Harry’s lap.

“Here is your book, Master Harry. It is helping you?”

“It has helped, yes. Once I know what kind of inheritances to look out for, it will help even more. Thanks Dobby.”

“You are being welcome. Dobby will bring tea and snacks soon.”

Bemused by the elf’s intense awareness of his needs, Harry just sat and stared at the book for a long moment before picking it up and flipping back to the section on Dragons.

“Ah, here it is,” he murmured and began to read from the page he had settled upon. “Dragons of old, better known as Greater Dragons, were extremely powerful and intelligent beings that took a great deal of satisfaction out of their interactions with other species, not the least of which was human wizards and witches. Greater Dragons were believed to be capable of such intricate feats of shape shifting that they could pass themselves off as human.”

“That is simply the most terrifying thought I have contemplated in a very long time,” Severus mused, shuddered visibly and gestured for one very amused teenager to keep reading.

“Dirty old man,” Harry quipped cheerfully and ignored Severus’ flustered blush for the page in front of him. He’d let Remus tease the potions master about it later on. “Where was I? Oh, yeah...children

born of these matings tended towards a much more fey and wild-spirited bent, but it was only with long term dilution of the blood that the discovery of many distinct traits became possible. These traits include species specific elemental affinities, immunities against various poisons and environmental threats like extreme heat or cold, a natural affinity with flight, partial racial memory and the inherited ability to speak with lesser and Greater serpents.”

“Oh Merlin...I really want to read that book...c’mon, Cub...don’t be so mean...” Remus actually uttered a very wolfish sounding whine and Severus grinned at the werewolf, a fact that did not go unnoticed by said wizard. “Alright, I won’t tease you if you don’t tease me.”

“Deal,” Severus agreed happily. “So you could be a many, many times removed descendent of some species of Dragon. Lucky you.”

“Uh huh. Sure. You just keep thinking those happy thoughts,” Harry grumbled. “I’m not part dragon or anything like that. Besides, it says that Dragon, Old Elven and Demon children usually don’t manifest signs until they’re between the ages of seventeen and twenty-five and even that depends on finding out which species is hiding out in your lineage.”

“That is something that we will find out for sure once we can get you to Gringotts. They have a potion that is very accurate for determining lines of inheritance.” Severus sounded very much like he would consider murdering someone to get a hold of either a sample of the potion or the recipe so he could figure out how it works. “The goblins may have some other useful information for you as well.”

“Well, that’s good to know, but it doesn’t help me right now,” Harry complained.

“Actually, Cub, its better that you don’t know what your full lineage is.”

“Why is that?”

“Well, for starters, you’re less likely to be upset if something doesn’t show up,” Remus reasoned. “And you won’t be as likely to make more of something that isn’t anything important...”

Subsiding abruptly, Harry sighed. He couldn't argue with that despite the major part of him that wanted to do exactly that.

"Yeah, you're right, but it's going to drive me a little crazy now that I know there may be more there than anticipated. Who would blame me? I pretty much have one mom and four dads magically speaking..."

"Great Merlin, save me," Severus whispered. "And to think, I didn't even get to properly enjoy the experience that led to your being..."

"Dirty old man..." Harry stuck his tongue out at Severus.

"Insufferable brat."

"Immature sods, the both of you," Remus stated. "Don't you have potions to work on or something like that, Severus?"

"I do and I believe I am expecting Harry to join me after his third lunch." Severus nodded to Harry and smirked at the not so thrilled look on the younger man's face. "I want to make sure he really has learned something from Salazar."

"Yeah, yeah, I'll be down as soon as Dobby thinks I've had enough to keep me going for an hour or so. You know he'll pop in an hour after I get down there to feed me again, so don't get mad at him, okay."

"I am expecting exactly that," Severus replied. "I will see you in the lab."

Watching the graceful and very well practiced way that Severus moved while he worked on his potions, Harry sighed and walked into the lab with Salazar's potions journal cradled against his chest like the treasure that it was.

"Severus?"

"Come on in, Harry. I will be done with this potion very shortly and then we can begin."

"That's a pain relieving potion, isn't it?" Harry wandered closer and peered into the cauldron. "It's a non-drowsy one, too. I've taken enough of both that I should know by now."

"Very good eye," Severus complimented. "The colour difference is fairly subtle and most people don't pay that much attention to what they're taking to know the difference."

"I'm in pain more often than I care to think about and I'm a tad bit too paranoid to not pay attention to what I'm being given."

"I don't blame you." Severus kept darting glances at the large tome in Harry's arms. "Is that really one of Salazar's journals or are you just having me on?"

"Oh, it was his alright. I was hoping that we could try out a few of his potions today if the ingredients are available." Harry had one in particular that he needed Severus' help on and this was the perfect way to get that help without a lot of fuss.

Taking his potion off of the flame and casting a stasis charm on it, Severus stretched and gave his entire attention to Harry.

"That sounds like an excellent idea. Which potions did you have in mind?" He accepted a stack of parchment from his apprentice for the day and blinked at the page that was covered in a small, neat handwriting that was completely unlike Harry's usual scrawl. "You wrote this?"

"I can be quite neat, but I found out that messy handwriting annoyed you, so I took advantage of the opportunity." The teen grinned wickedly at his speechless companion. "It worked quite well as a method of venting my frustration over your attitude towards me."

The pure passive aggressive nature of Harry's retaliation was such a Slytherin thing to do that Severus wasn't sure how to respond. He studies the green eyed teen briefly, shook his head and went back to reading through the parchments with a growing sense of awe as it

sank in exactly what Harry had given him. "These are Salazar's research notes..."

"Yes, they are. Keep reading and you'll see why I want to work on that particular potion. It's not the only one I translated out for you, by the way." Still grinning, Harry relaxed and waited for the potions master to finish skimming through.

"The handwriting thing was a very Slytherin thing to do, by the way," Severus mused. "I never would have had any idea that you did it deliberately if you hadn't told me."

"Yeah, well, the Hat wanted to put me in Slytherin as a first choice. It said I would have been great in there."

"Why did you end up in Gryffindor if Slytherin was its first choice?"

"I told the Hat 'not Slytherin, not Slytherin' and it let me go to my friends in Gryffindor. Draco made a very bad first impression on me and everyone kept telling me that only Dark wizards go to Slytherin. I know better now, but at eleven, I was still very impressionable and Hagrid and Ron's opinions coloured my own a lot."

"I'm impressed you got the damn thing to do what you asked," Severus mused. "This is a form of the Wolfsbane potion...a much more complicated form of it."

"I think it was for a friend of Salazar's names Argus, a lycanthrope of some kind," Harry interjected. "Argus isn't mentioned all that frequently, but enough for me to the idea that he was definitely a close friend, and not merely an acquaintance and I don't think he was a werewolf."

"Werewolves are the only kind of lycanthrope there is," Severus protested.

"I don't think so. According to the Ministry, yes, they're the only ones, but Sal used the parseltongue word /Suasurusha/ which basically means 'Great Cat' when he referred to Argus. He never once used

/Surbasra/, or 'Man Wolf'. There may not be any others now, but this was a thousand years ago, so who knows..."

"This potion might not work for Remus then..."

"It's worth a try, isn't it? The Chamomile and Echinacea would help aid in calming and healing if you only work that in to your formula..."

"We'll try it, Harry, but not a word to Remus until we have a stable potion. I refuse to get his hopes up about a better option until we have one to offer." Severus fixed the teen with a stern glare and was met with a similar gaze in reply.

"Yes, Severus, I know that. I'm not insensitive, y'know."

"I'm sorry. I know you aren't insensitive or stupid enough to do something that would hurt Remus like that." Severus sighed. "I just can't bear the thought of telling him about what you found and then having it not work..."

"We'll try and hope for the best." Harry sighed. "So, what should we make until you're ready to give that one a trial run?"

Later that same evening...

"Moony, Severus? Can I talk to you two? It's important." Harry fidgeted nervously in the doorway until they gestured for him to join them in front of the fire. Conjuring a chair without much thought, he sank down into it and frowned at the cheerfully crackling fire. Oblivious to the curious looks they shot at each other, he sighed loudly.

"Come on in and have a seat, Harry. You look like something is bothering you," Severus observed, one eyebrow rising sharply over the teen's nearly perfect wandless and wordless conjuration. He glanced at Remus before refocusing entirely on Harry for now.

"It will probably be easier to just spit it out, Cub. We can discuss it once we know what the problem is, okay?" Remus didn't like the uncertainty that was radiating off the younger wizard. It was almost as

if he expected to be hit for what he had to say. "It will be okay no matter what this is about."

"You can say that when you don't know what's bothering me," Harry stated forlornly, green eyes dark. "The first important thing is there's going to be a Revel tonight. That's why my mood was so high earlier...Tom was projecting and now that I've had time to think about it..." He shuddered almost violently. "All I got was a quick 'busy, can't talk, Revel tonight' and a 'don't choose tonight to be curious' warning almost as an afterthought...I guess Tom doesn't know that I've seen more than one Revel already...part of me still gets sick thinking about it, but the rest of me wonders if I'll miss out on the power surge if I'm not watching..."

Severus paled noticeably upon hearing the teenager's wistful, uncertain tone regarding the subject. He stared at Harry with very mixed emotions of his own while waiting for his brain to have a chance to kick back into gear. This kind of internal conflict could go either way and it was up to himself and Remus to keep the balance tipped towards feeling sick instead of curious enough to investigate. No pressure there, he grouched privately.

"How many Revels have you seen?" Remus didn't like how upset Severus and Harry were becoming and couldn't think of a way to easily diffuse the situation either.

"I've seen several," Harry murmured quietly. "Last year...they're excessively brutal, pretty much nothing but an insane display of sadism and lust, but the power...the power rush is wonderful..." The teen shivered a little, an action that was echoed unconsciously by Severus. Harry looked right at the older man and they shared a moment of nearly perfect understanding.

"You know how good it feels, Severus. Tom may not have realized that our bond was that open even then, but I'm pretty sure I got nearly as much of a rush off of it as he did...certainly more than the Death Eaters..."

"We had two Revels last year," the potions master whispered. "You...were there for both of them?" He looked like he might throw up.

"I saw what happened, what you and everyone there did." Harry rubbed his arms nervously. "I'm not saying I agree with any of Tom's methods, but once that high hits...I can't be sure that I wouldn't have been as bad as anyone there at that point..."

Remus studied both of their faces and swallowed convulsively. He definitely did not like the idea of this Revel happening so close to Harry's maturity, especially if it involved a power transfer of any kind. Something of that nature could trigger an early awakening.

"I can't think of anything that could possibly feel good enough to make you lose control of your morals like that..."

"Never say never until you've been there," Severus replied, pale face still a little green around the edges. "I can't even deny my actions." He nodded in Harry's direction. "He has seen me at my absolute worst."

"I've seen Tom and nearly every Death Eater at their worst," Harry mused. "It still disturbs me, but I've seen so much of it that I guess I've developed emotional calluses or something."

"Emotional calluses? Sweet Merlin, I hope not," Remus replied. "I can see that happening, but I kind of hope they're not as thick as they were before you went in and tore so many layers out."

"Yeah, well, if it's all the same to you guys, I think I'd rather be alone until after the Revel is over, but I know I shouldn't be...I don't know if I'll get a power surge since we're both more consciously aware of our bond, but I'd rather not find out by destroying something accidentally..." Harry sighed and shook his head. He really didn't feel like talking about the Revel anymore. Talking about it made it more real and he needed it to go back to the realm of distant memory. "Let's drop that for now, shall we...there's something else I'd like to talk to you two about. It's something I've been thinking about quite a bit lately and I'd like to hear what you think about it."

Hearing that tired, almost overly intense tone, both men groaned under their breath. Remus focused on the painfully nervous younger

wizard and braced himself for their second difficult conversation of the night. At this point, he wasn't sure there was any way to make everything less difficult given what had passed for an upbringing in his Cub's formative years.

"What's on your mind, Cub?"

"Who exactly is Harry Potter?" The teenager tilted his head to one side and arched an eyebrow inquisitively, his green eyes begging for and demanding answers in equal measure. He stood abruptly and began to pace with restless energy.

"Is Harry Potter the boy that everyone knew prior to the possession, the bold and brash, accommodating and naive Gryffindor Golden Boy? Is he this darker person I feel myself becoming? Are a lot of the things I'm worried about being brought on by my maturity and the sheer hell of being a teenager? I flat out don't know who I am anymore and it scares the hell out of me!"

"I wish I could offer better advice, but honestly, I find myself with very similar questions." Severus kept his tone as even and calm as he could to – hopefully – help keep the teen from becoming any more agitated than he already was. "I was only in my early twenties when Albus decided to start thinking for me...it's been almost fifteen years since I was freely myself and I am still trying to figure it all out." Severus grinned wryly at Harry and shrugged unhappily. "I don't have a looming magical maturity and the hormones of a sixteen year old boy to deal with, thank Merlin, but I do understand at least part of what you're going through."

"Exactly," Remus agreed. "I think you wouldn't be dealing with this sensation of split selves if Albus had just left you alone, but that was clearly too much to ask for. As it is, your constant proximity to Tom was bound to make you a bit darker, and the enforced behaviours have are making you doubt everything you thought you were...this is, sadly enough, something that we can help you work through, but only you have the answers to your questions about self."

Deflating abruptly, Harry dropped back down into his chair and gave voice to an pained sounding groan.

“That’s what I was afraid you were going to say...”

Warning! The following scene contains potentially offensive imagery.

July 29th, Unplottable Location

Lounged on his throne with a loose limbed, lazy grace that belied his eagerness for the night’s festivities, Voldemort seemed all the more intimidating for his cold, unfazed exterior.

“Wormtail,” he commanded quietly.

“Yes, Master,” Peter murmured and offered up his left arm the moment the Dark Lord’s hand began to reach down to him. Excruciating pain erupted throughout his body and he fought to swallow all but the smallest of whimpers; the pain ended as abruptly as it had begun and the sound of apparition filled the large audience chamber.

Rising to his feet, Voldemort spread his arms in a magnanimous greeting and waited until all of his gathered followers were kneeling at his feet before speaking.

“Welcome my loyal Death Eaters! Tonight we are rejoined by my complete Inner Circle and we welcome another twenty initiates to our ranks. Remember your own beginnings during this ceremony, for there is a Revel to follow!”

The large double doors at the back of the room swung open and banged against the walls with a resounding sound that reverberated through the room dramatically and there, framed in the large opening, stood two columns of six finely robed, silver masked Death Eaters. Between the Inner Circle members were three columns of initiates in their simple robes and plain white masks.

Marching forward in a swirl of robes, the twelve fanned out to stand to the sides of Voldemort’s throne like the spread wings of a gigantic bird of prey and the twenty initiates filed forward to present themselves in three rows before the Dark Lord. As if responding to

some silent cue, they all went to their knees before him and waited with bowed heads.

Pleased by the precision and overall assurance of the initiate's actions, Voldemort stood to loom over them, his crimson gaze studying the kneeling ones like a dark god deciding if he would accept or decline an offering he had found left on the altar of his temple.

"Before I welcome you into my service, you must understand that the Dark Mark is a magical oath that will bind you to serve me and my cause of ridding the Wizarding world of those who are unworthy of the magic they wield, those whose impure blood has led our society to the despicable level it is now at." Voldemort paused, crimson gaze bright and chillingly cold as it passed over the ranks of kneeling Death Eaters and Initiates. "Back out now and your release into death will be quick. Betray me once the Mark is done and I will leave you begging for a mercy that is painfully slow to answer."

The majority of the soon-to-be Death Eaters shifted nervously, but a scarce few remained resolute and Voldemort was pleased. These few might prove to be the replacements he needed for those Inner Circle members who had grown weak and unreliable.

"You will now prove your willingness to follow my orders and your ability to do what must be done to cleanse our world." Looking on as each man came forward and proved that they were willing and did indeed have what it would take, Voldemort smiled privately as the screams of pain and pleas for mercy washed over him like the most perfect musical notes that dropped into sudden silence with the confidently spoken Avada Kedavra of one of the Aurors who had chosen to join him.

Several of the initiates had demonstrated a creative cruelty that proved exactly why they had found themselves locked away in Azkaban and he noted those who took true pleasure in their 'work' while automatically assigning them to raiding parties in the back of his mind. Making other plans for those who had shown more restraint, he smirked and rose to loom over them yet again.

“You have proven yourselves to be quite capable, but now is the time to prove your worth. Come forward to accept my Mark without flinch or cry, my newest Death Eaters. Come forward to be welcomed.”

Gesturing for the newly Marked Death Eaters to join the rank and file of his lesser followers, Voldemort stalked down from his raised dais and came to a stop on the centremost rune of an intricately carved ritual circle.

Excitement stirred through the ranks of the more seasoned Death Eaters and the Inner Circle shifted with eager anticipation. Their excitement quickly spread to even the newest of the recruits when thirteen naked wizards and witches walked into the room, their faces blank with the tell tale effects of the Imperious curse.

Looking into the vacant eyes of each sacrifice as they moved to circle him, Voldemort smirked maliciously and let his aura flare to life around him in a visible display of power that deepened his hold on the thirteen and dropped them to their knees the moment he wished it to happen.

Drawing a slender silver blade from somewhere in his robes, he sliced his palm and moved with serpentine grace from sacrifice to sacrifice as he marked them on their brow and chest with his blood. Returning to his place in the center of the circle, he gestured sharply at the floor to splatter his blood on the rune at his feet and the circle flared to life with a rush of power that drew gasps from the surrounding Death Eaters.

All thirteen victims stiffened visibly when the circle closed around them and Voldemort released his hold on their minds. Beginning the first part of the ritual, he savoured their struggles and braced himself for the surge of power.

“Vox illae virtualamen est vehementer captus, reus ut meus vox quod per mihi illis quisnam es fidelis volo! Ego excito vestri vox quod edo is!”

The rune Eihwaz formed on the foreheads of his victims, marking them as his, and Voldemort spread his arms wide as he cried out the

last syllables and the men and women circling him arched violently and screamed and shrieked as their magic was forcibly ripped from their cores and devoured by the creature that stood in the center of the maelstrom.

Holding the lion's share of the power close, Voldemort rode the energizing, euphoric rush and threw the rest out through the Mark into his followers who cried out their ecstasy and writhed in a haze of lust and seemingly god-like power. Basking in the pleasure he and his followers were feeling the Dark Lord felt every doubt and misgiving fade under the burning need to feel this sensation again and again. Splattering more of his own blood on the central rune, Voldemort began the second chant that would bind the souls of his sacrifices to the ritual room's power nodes.

"Ego redimio cruor quod phasmatis of meus virtualamen ut is locus of vox pro totus vicis! Per meus cruor ut vestri ego excito vestri phasmatis!"

Every carefully enunciated word carved four runes deeper and deeper into the chests of the thirteen sacrificial lambs until their blood flowed in a torrent over the floor, soaking Voldemort's feet as they bled out violently. Feeling their impending deaths, the crimson eyes wizard drew a complex rune in the air and cackled madly when the power levels reached a breathtaking crescendo as the thirteen died simultaneously, leaving him surrounded by the glowing silvery mist that was all that remained of the men and women who had shuffled into the room under his Imperious.

"Is solemnitas of vox suscipio per is, meus virtualamen viscus quod patientia!"

The blood on the floor absorbed rapidly into the stone and the thirteen swirling forms circled Voldemort once before darting off to be absorbed into the major node runes that supported the ritual room's power. Sparing barely a glance for the now desiccated husks that surrounded him, panting softly as the dark sensuality of the ritual he had just performed wormed its way past his usual cold reserve, Voldemort repeated the final phrase of the ritual and soaked up the ecstatic cries of his followers.

“Is solemnitas of vox suscipio per is, meus virtualamen viscus quod patientia!”

Voldemort returned to his throne and settled in to watch as the initial group of previously invisible prisoners came into view with a wave of his hand and his Death Eaters descended upon them like wolves. The first screams pierced the relative quiet of the large room and sent a shudder of arousal through his body, causing him to hiss his pleasure.

Observing Voldemort for a few minutes, Lucius was relieved to note that his Lord's mood still appeared to be very high. Separating himself from the pack, Lucius crawled forward on his hands and knees to lay himself at the Dark Lord's feet with the memory of the first time he had given himself up so completely playing through his mind. After nearly fifteen years of utter and complete freedom, he wasn't sure how easy it would be to give himself up to that level of servitude again but if the Dark Lord chose to master him fully there would be no fighting what he himself had offered the domineering man.

“Master...”

Voldemort tasted the utter submission that flavoured Lucius' scent before he was even aware of the noble's presence at his feet. Looking away from the rape and torture he had been so thoroughly engrossed in watching, he groaned his pleasure at seeing Lucius offering himself so freely at his feet. It had been many years since Lucius had done this and he had almost forgotten how much he loved to debauch and demean the proud and haughty Malfoy patriarch.

“Do you think to throw yourself at my feet now to avoid the punishment you have properly earned, Lucius?”

“No, Master...please...I can't bear it any longer...please...” At a loss for words, uncertain of how to ask for what his body and psyche had been craving for fifteen years, Lucius nearly wept from his frustration. “I Need...”

“You need to be broken and remade into whatever I desire you to be, my Silver Fox? You need to be used by someone who knows how to make you feel alive?” Voldemort shifted restlessly as his own desire surged accordingly. “You want me to hurt you, don’t you, Luciussss.”

“Yes, my Master,” Lucius moaned and pressed his body up against Voldemort’s legs like a large cat, his silver eyes luminous in the dimly lit room. “All of that and more...it’s been so long since I felt anything real...”

“Then pleasure me, my pet, and remind me why male Veela descendents are such a jealously coveted breed,” Voldemort commanded and shifted to make room for Lucius between his knees. The beautiful man pulled his robe open and he threw his head back and groaned deep in his chest before mastering his own responses and letting his fractured attention shift focus between the pleasures offered by the blonde that was working his length with such slavish devotion and the writhing mass of animalistic debauchery that was taking place in front of him.

“Such a hot mouth...that’s a good pet,” he groaned and rocked with the rhythm of the blonde’s movements. Lowering one hand, he fisted it in the hair at the tender nape of his favourite catamite’s neck and tightened his grip until the blonde whimpered from the pain of his punishing hold.

Ears filled with the screams and grunting groans of the Revel taking place at his back and the lower, hissed sounds of his master’s pleasure, Lucius Malfoy lost himself in the consuming, instinct driven Need that had led him to this very position when he was barely sixteen years old. He whimpered at the painful grip his Master had taken on the hair at his nape, and that was all the warning he received before the searing burn of a playfully whispered ‘crucio’ lit his nerves on fire with a pain that threatened to overwhelm the pleasure of having his master use him again.

He screamed around the flesh that filled his mouth because he knew to do anything else would mean his death if he was lucky and far worse if not. That same hardness that he had been so eagerly fellating now forced itself deeper, thrusting into him with bruising force

and his renewed pleasure twisted itself up into knots around the agony until he couldn't tell where one sensation ended and the other began.

Part of him struggled to reject the punishing abuse he was being made to endure, but the less human majority welcomed it with an undeniable eagerness that drowned out his weakening protests. Overwhelmed by the long denied call of his blood and the seductively pulsing power of the Revel, he surrendered to his Lord's possession of his body.

Keenly aware of the exact moment when Lucius' human side stopped struggling against the Veela, Voldemort pressed his advantage and used his mouth even more brutally, the hands that clawed at his hips and thighs adding the spice of pain that he needed to push his own pleasure over the edge into release. Riding the waves of pleasure, part of his mind searched for any resistance on the part of the younger male and assured him of his complete submission even as he felt the blonde spasm and shudder in his grip, then go pliant and cat-like in the afterglow of his orgasm.

"That's my pet," he hissed playfully and urged him onto his lap, crimson gaze roaming over the bloody and ruined bodies of the first round of victims while he prepared to stake his own claim on one who had once belonged solely to him. This time, he would make certain that nothing and no one could shake his control of the slowly writhing, wanton creature he held on his lap.

Losing himself in the pleasures offered by Lucius' surrender to him, Voldemort caught only the briefest glimpses of the debauchery and depravity that was going on around him. Gaze focusing aimlessly, he let those snapshots of cruelty feed his own pleasure as the energies of pain, sex and death continued to feed the power of the ritual that was this Dark Revel.

He blinked and focused on Wormtail as the small man caught a young, barely pubescent girl by the throat with his silver hand and proceeded to beat her until she hung limply in his grip and cried piteously for him to let her go. Throwing the weeping girl-child to the floor, he laughed and bared the evidence of his obvious excitement.

Seeing her attacker in such a state, knowing what he intended to do after having seen the same done to her own mother, the girl tried to scramble away and Wormtail fell upon her like the rat he was. Biting and clawing at delicate pale skin, he forced her legs apart and thrust himself into her, every movement of his body punctuated by shrill screams of pain and terror.

The eager body impaled on Voldemort's lap jerked his attention away from his current voyeuristic fascination with a particularly skilful movement that left him gasping for more. He hissed at the blonde and renewed his own attack on fine, pale flesh.

Distracted from his use of Lucius' body once more, this time by a new kind of scream, Voldemort focused on one of the younger Aurors. The man had a sharply glittering blade in each hand and was taking his victim apart in a manner eerily reminiscent of the stories he'd heard of a 'Jack the Ripper'...the sight of so much blood and suffering excited him further and he focused on his lover with renewed vigour until the early hours of the morning left the Death Eaters with no more victims to torment.

Lassitude set in and the room slowly emptied as the revellers drifted away to find a place to sleep off the drunken state they now found themselves in.

End of naughtiness...

July 30th, The Burrow, Neville's Birthday Part I

Molly Weasley bustled around the kitchen at the Burrow and shuttled heavily laden dishes to the table and the farthest parts of the counter in what appeared to be a mad rush to complete a last minute meal, but were in reality just her usual method of cooking when she knew there was going to be a party.

"Ronald! George! Fred! Get the tables set up so the girls can set out the silverware and everything else that needs to go out!"

The stairs rumbled under the assault of three stampeding young men and Molly groaned under her breath even as she smiled happily at her boys. They tore outside through the partially open door and the plump woman winced when it banged sharply against the outer wall and slammed shut as a result of their exuberance.

“Were we ever like that, Arthur, dear? I honestly don’t think we were...but if not, where did they get it from?” She laughed at her husband’s overly innocent expression and in him could see an older echo of her fun loving boys. “Alright, alright, they come by it rightly, but for Merlin’s sake, do they have to take it out on the house?”

Joining Molly in a good laugh, Arthur shook his head and sighed happily. With everything that had gone so badly over the last week or so, it felt good to have something worth smiling and laughing over.

“How about I go out and supervise so the tables get set up with a minimum of battles,” he offered and rose to go to his wife’s side. “Don’t worry, Love. We’ll get to do this for Harry soon. You’ll see. Remus wouldn’t let any harm come to Harry and you know it.”

“But it’s my job to worry, Arthur. That poor boy has never known a mother’s love except what little I’m allowed to give him. I will worry until I get to hug the stuffing out of him myself.” Molly swiped at her face to catch the tears in case the children came in unexpectedly. “Go try to keep them out of trouble, dear. Neville and Augusta will be here soon and I’d like things to be in some sort of order by then.”

“As my lady commands,” Arthur teased and vanished out the door in a much more sedate manner than his sons had used.

“Neville! Happy Birthday!” Ginny leapt at the laughing boy much like she had done Harry the day before and hugged him fiercely when he did exactly what she expected and caught her in his arms. Letting go once he started laughing even more, she smiled at Augusta and held out her hand. “Welcome to the Burrow, Mrs. Longbottom. Mom’s just finishing up the food, but I can show you inside to a comfortable place to sit while we all get everything set up.”

"I know the way, Ginevra. Make sure my grandson stays out of trouble and I'll go find your parents." Augusta smiled a little and shook her head as she wandered towards the house. When had all of these children grown up into these young adults?

"Molly, Arthur?"

"Augusta? I'm in the kitchen," Molly called back. "Arthur's outside keeping the twins in line. Have a seat and tell me how you've been doing." Setting a cup of tea in front of the older witch, Molly smiled and sat down with a cup of her own. "Your Neville seems to be doing so much better..."

"I must admit that I had my reservations about this Mind Healer Monroe, but he has done more for Neville than the dozen healers before him," Augusta admitted reluctantly and sighed when she sipped at her tea. "He is so much like Frank was at this age and that terrifies me, Molly. I am so afraid I am going to lose him to this war like I lost Frank to the last one..."

It was Molly's turn to drink some tea and sigh unhappily. This was a subject that weighed on her heart like a constant spectre and she felt helpless to do anything about it.

"We all lost dear ones to the last war," she murmured, voice tight. "My Ronald and Ginny have already been hurt by this one and they will be amongst those that fight...all of my babies will try to fight in this war...I can feel it and I don't know how to stop it, or if I should even try..."

Hearing someone else voice her own fears and concerns put Augusta a little more at ease – it was easier to deal with when you didn't have to face it alone.

"Neville tells me that the Potter boy will be the one to lead the way in the war and that he will follow in the footsteps of other Longbottoms before him to rally to Lord Potter's battle standard...I can't fault him and I certainly can't stop him..." She sighed explosively. "Your family has no such obligation to the Potter line. What makes you so certain that they will rally to him?"

Molly stared at the older woman disbelievingly for several moments before she was able to find her voice.

“You obviously haven’t met Harry if you have to ask that, Augusta. He inspires loyalty – people who know him in passing would follow him into this war. Those of us who know him well and love him would do almost anything for him.”

Surprised to hear this from Molly despite her grandson’s loyalty, Augusta shook her head and sighed.

“No, I have not made his acquaintance, and I will reserve judgement on his character until I have the opportunity to do so.”

“That’s fair enough, I suppose, but don’t let the children hear you talk like that.” Molly giggled a little and waved the older woman back into her seat. “They’ll give you an earful, is all. Well, I’d best get this food out onto the tables before those teenagers perish from hunger.”

“Happy Birthday, Neville,” Luna murmured and hugged the blushing teen with a great deal more decorum than Ginny had displayed. “You look like you’re in a good mood today.”

“Of course I am.” Neville grinned and hugged Hermione before Ron could smack him on the back and jar him to his toes. “I don’t have to sit through a supposed party of old relatives who just want to gossip amongst themselves.” He shuddered and laughed. “I’d much rather be here with you guys so we can gossip about the adults and plan a party for Harry later on.”

“Much later on today, definitely,” Hermione agreed. “This is your birthday party and we want you to enjoy it.”

“There will probably be Quidditch later if you want to play,” Ron interjected. “Charlie and Bill are coming in later this afternoon and they said you can’t leave until they get here because they have presents.”

“They do?” Neville blinked. “Wow. Okay. It’s not like I’m in a hurry to get home or anything. Here comes your Mom with food...that sounds really good right now. I didn’t eat this morning since I wanted to be able to eat here...”

“Happy Birthday, Neville!” Molly set the dish she was carrying on the table and pulled the teenager into a fierce hug. “I am so glad we were able to throw a party for you, dear boy. You lot look hungry, so dig in. There’s plenty for lunch now and dinner later on today, too.” Molly bustled away to bring out the next wave of dishes.

“What time is it, anyway?” Luna swayed slightly and shook her head as if to clear it. Someone gently lowered her into a chair and her head fell back, eyes distant and unfocused. “It’s time...”

July 30th, Snape Manor

Waking after a night of confused and confusing dreams, Harry discovered the letter at the beginning of the sixth Goblin book and felt something inside him self shatter with a vague sense of rightness that made him smile even as the sense of anticipation that dogged his thoughts deepened further. Sending off a quick note to Griphook as he seemed to recall the goblin had wanted him to do if he found the letter, he made his way to the dining room, only to discover that his appetite had died a sudden and unexpected death.

Of course, he’d been feeling strange for days now, so he didn’t feel quite right blaming the letter or the book for his new set of strange symptoms. Everyone was as solicitous as ever and, by Noon, he could barely keep his eyes open. Letting his feet carry him forward automatically when a small hand grabbed onto his own, he lost all awareness of the outside world as soon as the door to the Ritual room sealed itself behind him.

Suddenly, everything focused into a crystalline clarity and he found himself standing at the edge of the pool of light he had come to know as his magical core.

“So beautiful,” he whispered and smiled when he saw that it was no longer obstructed in any way. Giving in to a powerful instinct, he

stepped out from the edge and let himself drop into the pool and sink into its depths. Floating buoyantly, he curled into a ball and fell into a deep sleep surrounded by the liquid warmth of his magic.

TRANSLATIONS

Vox illae vitualamen est vehementer captus, reus ut meus vox quod per mihi illis quisnam es fidelis volo! Ego excito vestri vox quod edo is! - Translates to: The power of this sacrifice is forcefully taken, bound to my power and through me to those who are loyal to me! I call forth your power and devour it!

Ego redimio cruor quod phasmatis of meus vitualamen ut is locus of vox pro totus vicis! Per meus cruor ut vestri ego excito vestri phasmatis! - Translates to: I bind the blood and spirit of my sacrifice to this place of power for all time! With my blood to yours I call forth your spirits!

Is solemnitas of vox suscipio per is, meus vitualamen viscus quod patientia! - Translates to: This festival of power begins with this, my offering of flesh and suffering!

Suasurusha-‘Great Cat’ in Parseltongue

Surbasra-‘Man Wolf’ in Parseltongue

AN: I am going to be working on a story that one of my favourite authors, Shadowface, began and had to discontinue. Shadowface has given me permission to run with it, and I plan to do exactly that, so keep an eye out for Harry Potter and The Warlock's Calling: Reloaded.

“...Tearing it back unveiling me.

Taking a step back so I can breathe.

Hear the silence about to break.

Fear resistance when I'm awake...”

- Godsmack “Awake”

July 30th, The Burrow, Noon, Neville's Birthday Part II

“What time is it, anyway?” Luna swayed slightly and shook her head as if to clear it. Someone gently lowered her into a chair and her head fell back, eyes distant and unfocused. “It's time...”

“It's time for lunch,” Ron declared in his usual oblivious way. Hermione's sharp smack to the back of his head made him yelp and focus away from food onto the issue at hand. He frowned down at the dazed blonde.

“What's wrong with Luna?”

“I don't know...” Hermione trailed off as Luna's shifted abruptly in her chair.

Sitting up, posture rigid and straight backed, Luna's eyes took on a whitish cast and then she spoke in a voice that was both rough and wispy all at the same time.

“...The Sleeping Dragon Wakes...He shall rise like the sun to light and scorch the land...Two brothers shall shine...one in twilight, one in night...the stars shall avert their gaze and alter the course of fate...”

“Death has laid hold of the Serpent and been denied...His legions will swoop down and devour all for he who desires the world...”

“Three shall perish to set the course of twilight's rise...A Wolf shall act as standard bearer...A Raven shall be the sinister hand...”

“Two shall shine...Two shall be consumed by the Flame...One shall emerge, healed and whole... The Sleeping Dragon Wakes...”

Rummaging in her pockets, Hermione pulled out a ball point pen and sighed gratefully. Rapidly scribbling the girl's words onto a napkin, she kept an eye out for anyone who might have noticed their strange behaviour. Relaxing only once Luna blinked awake, Hermione reread the eccentric girl's prophecy and swallowed convulsively.

“Did I go away again?” Luna whispered and saw by the looks on their faces that she had, indeed, ‘gone away’ again. “Oh dear. What did I say this time?”

Handing over the napkin, Hermione poured a glass of lemonade for Luna and set it before the still slightly dazed girl.

“Why didn't you tell us you were a Seeress?”

“I'm not as far as I know. I just go away sometimes and I say strange things when I do.” Luna accepted the napkin from the older girl and read it with a frown of confusion. “This isn't like what I usually say,” she mused and handed the napkin back to Hermione. “It's usually much more disjointed, more like random things about crumbling pedestals that can't be fixed and a strange, new species of serpent. If those things mean anything, I still haven't figured them out.”

“Does anyone ever keep track of what you say whenever these episodes happen?” Ginny took her friend's hands and wrapped them around the cool glass of lemonade and urged her to drink some of it. “Because that sure sounded like a prophecy to me.” The ginger haired girl shivered and rubbed her arms reflexively. “A not so very nice prophecy...”

“I know what you mean,” Hermione whispered and shook her self free of the mood inspired by Luna's words. People were going to notice their subdued behaviour pretty soon and her practical nature took over. “But there's nothing we can do about it right now, and we have a birthday to celebrate, so let's have fun and worry about what this might mean later.”

Pleading with her eyes for her friends to follow her lead, Hermione smiled and also poured Neville a glass of lemonade. "Here you go, Nev."

Content to drop the subject for now since she wasn't sure this bunch of statements meant any more than anything else she had said when she went away, Luna offered only one comment before settling in to enjoy her glass of cold lemonade.

"Talk to my father. I'm pretty sure he writes down what I say when I go away."

Nodding her understanding, Ginny threw herself into helping Hermione play hostess for their table by getting plates and silverware arranged while her bushy haired friend continued to pour drinks.

"Does that mean we can have lunch now?" Ron asked his usually expected question with a mischievous grin and let Hermione smack him even as the others cracked up into laughter over the predictable display.

July 30th, Snape Manor, Noon

A rush of power alerted Dobby to his young Master's imminent magical maturity and he hurried to his side as quickly as he could without using magic. With his own in flux because his master's was, he didn't dare attempt anything until the change was over. Trotting up to Harry, the little elf gently guided the barely coherent wizard to the Ritual Room and made sure he was comfortable before rushing upstairs to find either Remus or Severus. Skidding to a stop beside the potions master, the elf tugged on Severus' sleeve and bounced more hyperactively than usual.

"Master Harry is sleeping in the Ritual Room now. Hims is growing into hims power. Dobby was thinking yous was needing to know," he declared in a babbling rush and immediately rushed away to the kitchens and his own safe and snug bed.

Barely making it to his own bed before he collapsed into an unconscious sprawl that one might call sleep, Dobby did the only thing he could to weather the tidal ebb and flow of his Master's surging magic – he let it do anything it wanted as old, deeply ingrained instincts warned him that any resistance could cause him pain and harm.

July 30th, Unplottable Location, Noon

Waking in the early afternoon following the Revel, Voldemort frowned. Why am I awake already? He quested around himself and found nothing out of the ordinary. Looking inward, he frowned and then paled noticeably. The bond between himself and Harry was alive and pulsing with the burgeoning power of the teen's magical maturity. Working quickly, almost frantically, to brace that damnable door as closed as it ever stayed, the Dark Lord cursed to and at him self. If this kind of power surge was bleeding off pressure through the bond to him, then he had to have bled off an incredible amount of power to Harry during the night. What an irony that would be, he growled. Dark Lord slain by the after effects of his own dark ritual as bonded's maturity spikes out of control...I can just see the headlines now, he thought in a dryly sarcastic tone.

Sequestering himself in his bedroom so he could focus without interruption, Voldemort locked the room down with every privacy spell and locking charm he could think of and then devoted his entire attention to keeping the metaphysical door in his mind shut once he realized that the power levels had only begun to build. It didn't look like the assault on his defences was going to stop any time immediately and he had no way of knowing how long it would last so he stretched out and got as comfortable as was possible given the cause of his enforced lay in.

July 30th, The Longbottom Estate, 8:00 P.M.

"Good night, Gran. I'm going to bed. I don't feel very well," Neville murmured and waved listlessly before ghosting away to his room and the very inviting bed that was waiting for him.

Augusta frowned and watched her grandson trudge up the stairs, her thoughts turning to what his maturity would be like and if he would even have one that was noticeable. Prior to his progress with the mind healer, she hadn't thought he would experience anything, but she still remained locked in the mindset that he was still nearly a squib and assumed that nothing much of note would happen.

"You'll feel better in the morning, Neville."

Tossing and turning from the moment he laid down, unable to find a position that was comfortable enough for him to fall asleep, Neville groaned and finally threw off his comforter when the fabric's weight left him feeling pinned down and trapped. He could feel his magic beginning to ebb and flow more noticeably and it alternately ached and itched deep inside his body, then right on the surface of his skin. He felt like his body was being stretched to its limits by some great beast that was trying to fit inside him, but he wasn't shaped right for whatever it was trying to do to him and it appeared to be quite determined to force the fit. Clawing at his arms and chest as the burning, itching surges of energy grew stronger and more painful and forced themselves through scarred and unused magical conduits, he finally lost the battle on his control and started to scream with the onset of the peak of his magical maturity.

Feeling no need for concern, Augusta stayed up for a little while before retiring to her own rooms in the opposite wing of the manor home. A scarce few hours later she was abruptly awakened her grandson's piercing, pain filled screams and what sounded like the explosive destruction of half of the wing where his rooms were located. Running as fast as she could, the elderly witch beheld a scene that was, in her mind, straight out of hell.

Walls were splintered and the floor and ceiling were heavily scorched around the suspended form of Neville Longbottom, but the teen was completely oblivious to trivial details like the condition of his ancestral home. Certain that his magic was going to physically tear him limb from limb, he thrashed violently and screamed with every pulse of magic that shot out from his core with all of the searing, focused intensity of a laser; pain far worse than the Cruciatus ripped through his very essence and drove him towards the brink of madness again

and again, and soon all he wanted to do was die. Forging new paths where none could be found so that it could flow unimpeded through its host's body and mind, Neville's magic finally completed its work and settled into his core where it belonged before allowing him the oblivion of unconsciousness.

Horried by what her grandson's magic had done to her house and by the agony she had heard in his voice, Augusta looked on in stunned, shocked silence when her grandson's movements abruptly stilled and the screams faded to low whimpers as his body came to rest on the floor where his bed had been prior to his maturity. Dropping down unceremoniously to the floor, she sat in the ruins of the hall outside what had once been Neville's bedroom and sobbed, her gaze never leaving his still form. At that point, she was almost certain that his maturity was going to kill him and couldn't think of what to do through the shock that had enveloped her mind.

"I can't lose my Neville...please don't take both of my boys from me..."

July 31st, Snape Manor

After having spent the main day of the full moon with an unusually active and chipper werewolf, Severus was almost relieved to be making his way down to his potions lab. Since Remus should be unavailable for conversation or companionship for the latter hours of the current day and on through the entirety of the next, he let his mind focus on completing the potions the Dark Lord required of him.

Working through the night as an unknown source of energy kept him going without lapse, he managed to get all three potions to a safe stopping place. That unexpected source of energy trickled off and suddenly seemed to vanish around dawn and he just barely managed to place stasis charms on the cauldrons before stumbling into the sitting room just off from his personal lab. Collapsing onto the first couch he came to, he instantly fell into a deep and dreamless sleep.

Uncertain why he felt so good for a day when he should be recovering from one transformation and had yet another to endure with the coming moonrise, Remus enjoyed the chance to actually be

good company to someone during a full moon and was just as happy to wander through the manor once Severus vanished down into the dungeons to wile away the hours in his potions lab.

Settling in the library for most of his time, he delighted in having access to so many old and, in many cases, rare books on a wide variety of personally intriguing topics. Finding little information that might explain his sudden reprieve from the pain and debilitating effects of his curse and afraid to hope that it could be more than a fluke, Remus put the issue from his mind and vowed to enjoy it as a one time gift. The house elves kept him supplied with food and drinks and for the first time he felt little in the way of dread about the coming of the moon.

Retiring to his own dungeon room knowing he must spend his next two nights there, Remus still gave in to the call of the moon with a joyful howl that came from the depths of his essence. For the first time in longer than he could remember, for the first time since the Marauders had run the moons together, he did not feel imprisoned by the room he stayed in to protect others. He felt the change begin and was shocked to feel almost no pain, and what little he did feel served as an affirmation that he was free and alive as the wolf burst free from the cage of his human form. Shaking himself vigorously, the massive golden wolf threw back its head and howled again simply for the sheer pleasure of doing so.

July 31st, Ritual Room, Snape Manor

Flashes of dreams filled Harry's consciousness and he revelled in the depth of emotion they brought to him. Uncaring of the source or their meanings for now, he let them wash over his consciousness and fill him up with the joy and comfort their images left behind.

Soaring, swooping and diving over an impossibly green forest and he laughed his delight when his passage caused flocks of colourful birds to explode into motion in his wake and disturbed other, unknown animals into noisy protest if he came too close to the trees. Unfamiliar structures appeared beneath him even as he flew higher to enjoy the pure freedom that was flight...

Snuggling in close to the soft feathery warmth and comfort of one he knew would protect him from harm, he sighed contentedly when longer feathers closed around him to shield him from the brightness so he could sleep on undisturbed. A lilting, beautiful song lulled him back into unconsciousness faster than any lullaby...

Harry caught a brief glimpse of deep, dark places that reeked of even darker magics and that brief moment of awareness stirred up a deep, driving hunger in the depths of his being before he was pulled away by the joy of meeting a Speaker and the satisfaction of not being alone. He could feel the deeply instinctual bond of friendship that was meant to form between serpent and Speaker and was lulled away again, this time by the comforting support of the coils of some great snake...

The red rush of the Hunt and the all encompassing security of the Pack flowed through him and he let his own joyful howl sound out in answer to the singing power that filled his blood and made his body seem too small for everything it made him feel. He felt the Call of Mother Moon and twisted and sought to be free of whatever was binding him to this frail form with all of the restless desire the beast inside him felt in response to Her Call until the cooling calm of the great serpent's coils returned...

Focusing on the gentle, grounding support of those powerful coils, he opened his eyes and gasped. Reaching out to stroke the shimmering scales of the Black Basilisk that held him, Harry smiled his delight over its beauty.

/Why are you here/ he hissed curiously.

/I am part of your magic, part of your very blood and bones. I will always be with you, young Speaker./ The Basilisk nuzzled the young wizard and settled even more protectively around him. /We are one and the same./

More reassured by that last statement than he could put into words, the young wizard purred his contentment and snuggled further into the Basilisk's coils.

/I'm glad/ he hissed in reply and yawned while stroking smooth, cool scales. Every touch lulled him deeper towards sleep and he struggled against it weakly.

/Sleep young Speaker. You have much growing yet to do.../

The urge to sleep washed over Harry yet again and he didn't fight it this time. He could feel his magic working to remake his body and had no desire to be fully conscious, experiencing what was likely a very painful process. Sometime later, still content to lie cradled in the Basilisk's coils, he felt a presence that called him back to awareness with the gentle touch of sun-warmed feathers. His eyes widened when he saw a phoenix that looked very much like his last recollection of Fawkes perched on the coil nearest to him.

"Fawkes? Is that really you?"

"In a manner of speaking, yes, fledgling. Thanks to the workings of your magic, my tears have become a permanent part of your blood, so in some ways I, too, will always be with you right alongside the Basilisk. I have never before encountered this kind of synthesis between such diametrically opposed magical species, so I cannot even begin to try and tell you how it will affect you in the end."

"That's okay, Fawkes. It doesn't feel bad. It feels really good; actually...it feels right..."

"I am glad to know this, fledgling. The only advice I can offer is this – when you are in dire need, your blood will answer your call for aid."

"Do you know what will happen?"

"Regrettably, I do not, but whatever does happen will be only that which you and your magic are capable of supporting."

With that final enigmatic statement, the phoenix vanished in a flash of flames and oblivion claimed the young wizard before he could even begin to formulate a question.

July 31st, Unplottable Location

Immensely grateful for that small thread of attention he always kept focused on the bond he shared with Harry now that he was faced with a true need for it, Voldemort wondered if either of them was going to survive the day with their minds and magic fully intact. Bracing against a steadily rising surge of power that seemed to go on forever, he finally felt it level out after an uncertain number of hours.

The metaphysical creaks and groans coming from the door between their minds did nothing to help his confidence, though he was glad for the slow spill over of power, as his own reserves would certainly have begun to flag after such a long term, concerted siege. Where did this come from, my little serpent? What opened this great well of power in you? Glad for the chance to merely maintain his bracing stance instead of having to work so actively to keep the door closed, Voldemort contemplated whether or not any of the cause for this strange maturity was his 'fault' or if this was simply another aspect of things never going according to expectation with the always infuriating Boy Who Bloody Well Refused To Be Normal.

After what seemed like an eternity the assault abruptly eased, then ceased completely as the power levels on the opposite side of the bond smoothed out to a more normal seeming level even though Voldemort knew that wasn't possible. Startled by the sudden lack of 'pressure', his curiosity was cut short when his body collapsed into an exhausted sleep the moment his instincts said it was safe to do so. Tossing and turning through strange dreams of a shimmering black basilisk and the most brilliantly coloured red and gold phoenix he had ever seen, Voldemort marvelled at the beauty and strangeness of these magical beings and wondered where they could have come from.

July 31st, The Longbottom Estate

Neville groaned and tried to remember who had beaten him so viciously and what he had done to cause it to happen. Surely he'd remember pissing someone off this badly...then he did remember and wished he hadn't.

“Oh, Merlin, be careful what you wish for,” he groaned. “Why did it have to hurt so bloody badly..?”

“Neville!” Augusta choked back a cry of joy. My boy’s alive! “Can I get you anything? A pain potion? Some water?”

“Why was it so awful, Gran...it wasn’t supposed to be like that...”

“I don’t know why it was so terrible for you, Neville.” Augusta choked back a new wave of tears and forced herself to step up and take responsibility for the situation. She could have her grand crying jag once the dust had settled. “It should have been something you could have slept through, even without everything that has happened to you.”

“What time is it?” Neville felt a nearly frantic need to know what had happened...had this done him more harm than good? Had it damaged his magic further? Forcing himself to stop thinking so negatively until there was a reason for it, he waited for the time.

“I – Tempus.” Augusta sighed. “It’s just nine in the morning. Let’s get you to someplace more comfortable so you can rest some more.”

“Why didn’t you move me before?” Neville frowned in open confusion.

“I can’t carry you and I was afraid that using magic on you might hurt you even more. I couldn’t bear that thought...not after what you had already been through...”

“Oh, okay...In that case, I’m glad you didn’t move me.” Neville sighed explosively and slowly levered himself up off of the floor with a deep groan of pain. “I really need that pain potion and I need to see Healer Monroe once I get cleaned up and into some decent clothes.”

“You should rest...”

“I need to know what happened, Gran. Healer Monroe knows what my mind and magic looked like before all this happened, so he can look for any damage and obvious changes.” Neville finished pushing himself up to a standing position and swayed dangerously on his feet.

Now that he was awake and moving, he felt even more like he had been ripped apart and put back together rather roughly. "He didn't expect something like this to happen or he would have warned me."

Augusta nodded abruptly and climbed to her feet with her own groan as stiff joints protested her night spent on the floor. If there was any damage to his core or his magic, the sooner they found out, the better it would be for her Neville.

"Use the closest bathroom while I go fire call Healer Monroe. It may not be safe for you to use the floo, so I'll ask him to come here. I'll send Cissy to you with some clothes or have her transfigure some if she has to and I'll have her bring the potion and some tea up while you get yourself somewhat together." Watching her grandson slowly stagger his way down the hall, Augusta sighed and shook her head in bemused amazement over seeing him even capable of walking after what he had gone through. "Cissy."

"Cissy is hearing you, Mistress. The potion is in the wash room and tea is being in the nook. Is Mistress needing Cissy to look after the Young Master?"

"Please look after him...I'm afraid he might fall and hurt himself after what he's been through."

"Young Master had a bad growing up. Cissy will keep him safe." The elf vanished, leaving Augusta alone in the ruined hall.

"Good. Now, on to the next important thing..." Heading for the nearest fireplace after taking one last, awestruck look at the destruction around her, Augusta recovered her stiff composure. Who would have thought there was such potential locked away in my sweet Neville? The quiet voice of her conscience reminded her that someone had noticed and encouraged his potential or his loyalty to certain friends would not be so deep.

Throwing a handful of floo powder into the fire, Augusta called out her destination and stuck her head in the flames.

"St. Mungo's, Mind Healer's wing!"

“Thank you for calling the Offices of the Mind Healer’s Wing. How may I help you?”

“I need to speak to Master Mind Healer Monroe. It’s urgent! He is my grandson, Neville Longbottom’s mind healer...”

The receptionist nodded and vanished from sight. The next thing Augusta knew, she was looking into the concerned face of an older but vital looking Healer.

“We haven’t met, but I’m Master Mind Healer Monroe. How can I help you, Mrs. Longbottom? What’s wrong with Neville?”

“He went through his maturity last night and it was incredibly violent...Neville wanted you to check him over and I’m afraid to use any magic on or near him until I know he isn’t badly injured...”

“You did the right thing, Mrs. Longbottom. Let me get my bag and I’ll come through. This is most unexpected.”

Following Augusta upstairs after arriving via the floo, Octavius turned his head to look down the opposite way the older woman was trying to lead him when he felt a strong magical residue. Patting her hand gently, he sighed.

“His room was down that hall?”

“Yes...how...?”

“I can feel the magic. Do you mind if I take a quick look? It might give me a few clues as to what went on with young Neville.” Receiving an abrupt nod from his patient’s guardian, the Mind Healer made his way down to what must have once been the teenager’s bedroom and stopped with a hiss of surprised shock. Taking in the total destruction of the one room and the peripheral damage to the adjoining rooms and the hall, Octavius avoided going any further as he didn’t trust the structural stability of the floor at the moment.

“Was it the blast that alerted you to there being a problem?” he asked once he had rejoined the elderly witch. “I can’t imagine he gave you much warning or you’d have surely had him move down to your ritual room or some other warded room...”

“But he didn’t show any signs, Healer Monroe...he said he didn’t feel well and went to bed,” Augusta whispered. “All very much to be expected...”

“Then I will have a look at him and see what happened to cause such a sudden change as opposed to the expected quiet maturity,” Octavius assured her. “Please take me to him, Mrs. Longbottom. I am most concerned about your grandson’s well being.”

Neville looked up when the door opened and sagged with relief when he saw the mind healer. The pain he was feeling had been eased by the potion and a hot shower, but he still felt like he had been burned from the inside out.

“Healer Monroe...it still hurts so bad...what happened to me?”

“That’s what we’re going to find out, Neville,” Octavius murmured reassuringly and pulled up a chair close to the shivering teen. Framing his face with both hands, the mind healer inspected his patient’s skin colour and the responsiveness of his gaze before frowning. “You are showing some symptoms that are indicative of Cruciatus exposure. Can you describe for me what happened or would you prefer I have a look for myself?”

“Take a look,” Neville whispered tiredly. “I’m not even clear on half of what happened once the pain got to be too much...” He winced at even remembering what had happened and was soothed by the quiet voice of the mind healer.

“Shhh, Neville...just relax and let me take a look so you don’t have to try to explain,” Octavius urged and slipped into the boy’s mind when he gave him eye contact. Resisting the urge to itch at his own skin while he watched and observed everything Neville had gone through, the older wizard shook his head in silent denial. What he was seeing shouldn’t have happened and shouldn’t have even been possible.

Backing out of the memory, he took a look at Neville's mind in general and his magical pathways more specifically and was equal parts elated and horrified at what he was seeing. He returned to his own mind and sighed heavily while organizing his thoughts.

"Well, Mr. Longbottom, I can honestly tell you that you'll live and be all the better for having survived this particularly nasty event," he quipped, earning himself a weak grin from Neville and an almost offended glare from Augusta. "Your magical pathways were never as fully developed as they should have been, given the damage done to you at such a young age, but we had made a great deal of progress in repairing some of those damaged areas. Apparently your magic decided that we had the right idea and decided to forge all of the pathways you should have started developing in early childhood."

"I take it from your expression that this wasn't supposed to happen," Neville observed ruefully. "Just how not normal was this? Did I just pull a Harry?"

Blinking as he took a moment to follow the reference, Octavius finally grinned a little and shook his head.

"I have never heard of a case where someone gained this level of pathway development during their maturity, Neville. I will be honest with you in that I am quite surprised and very relieved that you survived the process...yes, I'd say in this instance you pulled a 'Harry'." Returning to his more direct and stern healer approach, he met Neville's gaze so there could be no mistaking how serious he was about what he was about to say.

"You must do no magic until I tell you it is safe, Mr. Longbottom. None at all. No magical travel, no having magic performed on you, no practicing spells, nothing of the sort."

"Is it the pain the potion didn't help? Is that those new pathways that are making me feel like I've been burned inside...?"

"That is the very cause. Those pathways need to heal completely or you will damage them. I will return on the fifth for a check up unless you experience any problems or have any questions before that and

hopefully I will be able to declare you well enough to start flexing the new extent of your magic by then. Is there anything in particular you would like me to tell your friends so they do not worry so much about you when you aren't present?"

Neville groaned and scrubbed his face with both hands. He hadn't even thought about the likelihood of the group being worried about his absence.

"Oh, man...I didn't even think about that...just tell them I pulled a Harry and had one hell of a maturity that I'll explain once I can get back together with them...tell them I'm fine." He grinned wickedly before smothering a yawn.

"I'll tell them, though I'm certain that last comment will mean more to them than it does to me." Smiling warmly, Octavius smoothed the boy's hair and shook his head fondly.

"I will leave you a Cruciatus relief potion to ease the pain from the muscle spasms and pain your maturity caused you. It should be a great deal more effective than just a pain potion. Now, you need to go rest, young man. Sleep until you wake normally and sleep again if you feel tired no matter how silly you may feel for sleeping the better part of a day or two. Eat as much as you're hungry for. Your body and magic know what they need and you'll heal faster if you do what they tell you to do."

"Thanks, Healer Monroe," Neville mumbled and yawned blearily as if the mere mention of sleep had stripped him of any remaining energy reserves. Stumbling to the bed, he burrowed under the comforter and was almost instantly out like a light.

Watching Healer Monroe interact with her grandson on such a deeply personal level that only true trust could allow made Augusta smile a wistful little smile and made her feel that much more comfortable with his presence. Listening to his explanations and admonitions with no small amount of surprise and, in some cases, indignation, she shook her head at the easy way he handled a teenage boy.

"You must be a wonderful father, Mind Healer Monroe..."

Smiling sadly, Octavius shrugged and gestured for Augusta to take Neville's seat.

"I appreciate the compliment and I suppose I would have been. I loved...I never got the opportunity to see my daughter grow up past the age of three, nor my son be born thanks to Voldemort and his lackeys in the first war. My wife and children were killed in a raid."

"Oh, sweet Merlin, I'm so sorry, Healer Monroe...I didn't even think..."

"You couldn't know and it has been nearly twenty years now...your grandson is a fighter, you know. He's going to bounce back from this and be stronger than you ever imagined."

"So he won't be a squib?" Augusta asked hopefully.

"A squib!" Octavius eyed the elderly witch curiously and wondered where she had gotten the idea that Neville would be a squib. "Neville never was a squib and he most certainly isn't one now. I just need you to make sure he does no magic until I clear him as fully healed. He's going to sleep a lot for the next few days and he will likely eat like a young horse to help restore his energy reserves, so he may be too occupied at first to think about it, but once those new pathways stop hurting so badly, he's going to be itching to see what he can do and he needs to be reminded that he can't do so just yet."

Nodding her understanding, Augusta relaxed visibly.

"So...how strong is he going to be once he's properly healed? Do you have any idea at this point?"

"It's difficult to tell, but we'll be able to do some basic testing once he's able to cast again. We can set something up when I return on the fifth for his check up if that is acceptable to you?"

"That is quite acceptable, Mind Healer. Thank you for taking the time out of your busy schedule to make a house call." Augusta smiled a little and sighed.

"It was no trouble, but I am going to take my leave, as I am bound to have four very antsy teens waiting outside my door wondering why Neville and I are late."

July 31st, St. Mungo's, Office of Master Mind Healer Octavius Monroe

Fidgeting with nervous energy, Ginny resisted – barely - the urge to bang her fists on Healer Monroe's door in case he was really in there and this was just a test to see how well they responded to a frustrating situation.

"Where's Neville? His Gran never lets him be late," Ginny observed. "Come to think of it, Healer Monroe has never not been here waiting on us, either..."

"I..." Hermione began and was glad to be cut off by the soothing voice of their Mind Healer.

"I apologize for keeping you all waiting without any kind of note, but I was called away rather unexpectedly," Octavius declared from behind the small group of teens. "I had to make a house call."

"Do you know if Neville is okay? He's not here and he didn't say he wouldn't be at his party yesterday..." Hermione trailed off when Octavius smiled warmly and gestured to unlock his office door.

"He won't be here today and may not be able to make it on the fifth," Octavius replied as they filed in and seated themselves in front of his desk. "I just returned from visiting him at his home because his maturity was very hard on him." He grinned a little. "He told me to tell you he 'pulled a Harry' and that he is fine."

"Pulled a Harry! How? What happened? Did he get hurt!" Ginny blurted out in a worried rush, an emotion that was echoed by the startled looks on the other three teen's faces.

"He won't be permitted to use magic for at least a week, and he is tired and achy, but otherwise healthy," Octavius replied reassuringly.

“He stated a wish to explain on his own once he was able to get back together with all of you.”

“He’ll be okay, though, right?” Luna smiled tentatively as her mind returned to the words she’d spoken at his party. “I...”

“He’ll be fine,” Ron said with a snigger and a rueful shake of his head. “We’ve corrupted nice quiet Neville...he’s cracking jokes even when he’s feeling bad. You know he was just yanking our chains with that, right?”

“I know, but...” Ginny sighed expressively and grinned at her brother. “You’re right. Nev will tell us all about his ‘adventure’ when we see him again and it’s looking like we’ll see him and Harry at about the same time.”

“Speaking of Harry, have you heard anything from Moony or Professor Snape?” Hermione tilted her head to one side and arched an eyebrow inquisitively.

“I haven’t heard anything, but young Mr. Potter’s maturity wasn’t due to even start until today...”

“It started yesterday and I bet there will be plenty to tell,” Luna stated with a secretive little smile.

“Yesterday?” Octavius studied the almost smug blonde and wondered how she could know when someone’s maturity began, but let that curiosity go for the concern of two irregular maturities from such a small group. Of course, he reminded himself. Not one of these young people fits the average mould, so maybe it isn’t so irregular after all. “I hope I will be able to check up on him like I did Neville.”

“I’m sure Harry will be here Monday right alongside Neville,” Ron declared. “There hasn’t been anything that could keep him down yet.”

“What he said,” Hermione agreed with a much happier grin. “They’ll both be okay and we’ll see them in a few days...”

August 1st, Snape Manor

8:00 A.M.

Awakened by bright sunlight, the potions master growled and threw an arm over his face to block out the offending light. Unsuccessful in his attempt, he rolled away from the light and landed unceremoniously on the floor with a muffled thump and a sharp curse.

Still cursing, Severus looked around like a startled cat that had just taken an unexpected tumble and relaxed only once he was certain that no one had witnessed his embarrassing and graceless moment. Rising from the floor, he stretched and realized he felt remarkably good for having just slept several hours on a monstrously uncomfortable old Victorian sofa.

Exiting the sitting room, he barely set foot in the hall before the loud bellow of Remus yelling for him startled him into motion. Running down the hall to check on what he fears is a heavily injured werewolf that shouldn't have been awake for several more hours at the earliest, Severus used to doorjamb to direct him into the room. Skidding to a halt he stopped and could do nothing more than gape at his much younger and healthier looking companion.

"What...you...look younger..." Allowing himself to be drawn over to the mirror by the werewolf, Severus blinked dumbly at his own changed visage. Raising a hand, he touched his hair to confirm that it was, indeed, about six inches longer than it had been when he went to sleep. Really looking at himself and Remus, he smirked and shook his head. "As nice as it is to not look ten years older than I should, whatever did this could have been considerate enough to straighten my nose or some such..."

Remus laughed at that petulant statement, earning himself a sharp glare that only made him laugh harder. Calming enough to comment, the werewolf grinned unrepentantly.

"I'm happy to not have so much grey in my hair that I look like an old man and all you can whine about is that you don't look prettier!"

Drawing himself up indignantly, Severus crossed his arms over his chest in an openly defensive posture and shook his head.

“That isn’t what I said, Moony...I simply...”

“Wanted your nose straightened?” Remus’ grin grew in proportion with Severus’ glare until the snarky man finally gave in and shook his head in defeat.

“I have no illusions about how people see me, Moony. Looking younger is better, but all that makes me is a younger ‘greasy git’.” Seeing the amused sympathy in his companions amber eyes forced a sharp laugh out of him. “Oh, stop it, you mangy hound! It didn’t make you any prettier either, so stop looking so damn superior about the whole situation.”

“You wound me, Severus! How could you be so cruel as to say I’m not pretty!” Ruining his attempt at pulling the spy’s leg by laughing halfway through his protests, Remus finally sobered up enough to pat his friend on the shoulder. “I think there’s a bit of an after effect of giddiness...we should check on Harry. If this was caused in any way by his maturity, then I’m almost afraid to find out what it did to him.”

“Don’t forget to check on that damnable house elf, as well, if that is your concern,” Severus pointed out. “As amusing as it is to watch a power drunk elf, this could have done more than leave him giddy and nearly useless.”

12:00 P.M.

Waking slowly, senses questing and finding only the silence of the ritual room and the blinding static of its overly charged walls, the newly matured wizard actually opened his eyes and gasped when he focused on the smooth ceiling above him. He could have sworn it had been covered with intricate carvings when Severus had shown it to him and Remus shortly after their arrival. Rolling to one side, he saw that the walls and floor were in a similar state of smooth barrenness that he just knew was a sign of destruction, not a normal state. Shaking his head as he decided to deal with it later, Harry levered himself up off of the Ritual Room floor and stretched with serpentine

flexibility. Taking one last look around before leaving the safety of the room's confines, he trailed a hand over the smooth, pitch black stone and hoped that he could see it restored to its original glory. Oblivious to his nudity, he slowly made his way up to the main floor and into the dining room.

"Severus? Remus?"

Startled by his Cub's sudden appearance and by the change in his scent and looks, Remus just sat and blinked at the young man.

"Cub?"

Spurred into motion by Remus' half disbelieving inquiry, Severus stood and crossed the room to the young man's side while unbuttoning his outer robe.

"Harry? Great Merlin!" The Potions Master swung his robe off of his own shoulders and around Harry's. Urging him to slip it on properly while he did up the buttons down the front, the potions master shook his head in stunned amazement.

"You're so much taller..." Guiding Harry to a chair, he urged him to sit. "Do you need a pain potion or anything?"

"Something that won't make me sleepy would be great," the newly Awakened sorcerer replied and grinned when a full meal appeared in front of him.

"How long was I out? I'm afraid your ritual room is trashed..."

"Just a sip should do it," Severus informed him and handed him the potion vial. "You were unconscious for a solid forty-eight hours, I believe. Given how the wards lit up right after you went into the room, I am unsurprised that the room is in a bad way."

Glancing out the window, Harry paused with his fork half way to his mouth, green eyes intensely focused on the vibrantly glowing, tangible wards.

“Wow, I’ve never seen wards that glowed like that. How long do you figure they’ll stay that way?”

“A few days at most. Eat up. You must be hungry. We can talk about everything that’s changed and happened once you’re done.” Returning to his seat across from where the teen was now sitting, he nudged the werewolf out of his surprised silence.

“Merlin’s bones, Cub...I knew your maturity had affected us and expected that you would change some, but...how do you feel? Really?” Remus sat forward, amber gaze memorizing the startling changes that his cub had undergone.

“How do I feel?” Harry mused quietly, green eyes focused with fascinated intensity on the glowing, swirling wards. “I feel a little achy, but since I’m a good bit taller, I guess that’s to be expected...I feel alive, unbound...I had no idea what it would feel like to actually fall into my magic and let it have free reign...” He trailed off into a goofy grin as that memory surfaced and he relived the moment he took a leap of faith and stepped off into the pool that led to his actual core.

Startled by the heat shimmer like aura that sprang into life around Harry when he drifted off with that odd little smile, Severus tilted his head to one side and cautiously reached across the table to touch the ethereal representation of the youth’s power. Shuddering, he drew back and part of the aura reached out to follow until he was completely back in his seat. Looking up he met the very amused green gaze of the teenager that sat across from him.

“What caused your aura to show?” Severus asked quietly as if he had never reached out to feel that burning rush of power.

“I was remembering the moment my maturity began, when I dropped into my core to sleep,” Harry replied and held up a hand with a curious expression on his face. “This seems a bit subtle to be the aura that goes with how my magic feels but I can live with it until something triggers the real thing,” he mused quietly. “How do you trigger it?”

“It could be a mood trigger like anger or you might just have to pump more power into it,” Severus replied. “I have only managed a visible aura a few times during my life and I have to be in a really bad place emotionally and magically for it to happen...”

“Mine is most likely to show up at council meetings,” Remus commented. “It tends to pop up when I’m really riled up and trying to get a point across. Funny thing that since it sure as hell makes you look a lot more powerful and impressive.” He laughed and brushed his fingers over Harry’s aura just as Severus had done a few minutes before. Shuddering just as visibly, he watched as the power also followed him back to his seat. “That shimmer is almost more unnerving than a full colour aura...”

Frowning, Harry realized one important thing and sat back so he could see both men.

“Okay...how do I turn it off? This isn’t the sort of thing they teach you at Hogwarts.”

“It’s a matter of will power that eventually becomes almost instinctual. Focus on making your power not visible and it should fade away.” Remus watched as his cub closed his eyes and focused on his magic and his core. After several long minutes of silence, the teen’s aura flared briefly into full colour before vanishing completely. “It looks like green and black flames down to the flare ups of other colours...it was faint, but it was definitely there.”

“That is going to take some practice,” Harry observed with a tired sounding groan. “Turning it on seems to be almost overly easy, but drawing it back in is really hard to do. I guess that means I know one thing for sure I’ll be working on before school starts back up.”

“We will also have to determine if you can still use that red wand or if you will need to see Ollivander for a new one,” Severus offered. “It may take the better part of the next month to gain a true semblance of control over your new level of power.”

“Rest today, though,” Remus stated firmly upon seeing the way his cub’s attention was drifting. “Get your focus back on the real world

and then we'll worry about some duelling and all of the fun things we need to do to figure out what some of your new limits might be."

"I can live with that," Harry murmured and realized he had finished his breakfast at some point when he hadn't been paying attention. "I think I'm going to go take a bath and actually get dressed...Dobby?"

The still power drunk elf scurried out of the kitchen and skidded to a halt at his master's side.

"Yous called Dobby, Master Harry? What can I be doing for you?" The little elf bounced with excess energy and spoke so quickly it was a wonder that Harry could even understand him.

"I'm going to need some clothes transfigured from the ones I have so they will fit me now. Do you think you can do that for me?"

"Dobby can be doing this for yous, Master Harry. Yous clothes will be ready when yous bath is done!" The elf scurried away again.

"How long does that sort of thing usually last?" Head tilted almost sideways, Harry watched one of the other elves watching Dobby with cautious amusement. "The others don't seem too surprised..."

"Of course not. When my power levels are boosted by the Revels, my elves are slightly drunk from it as well. I'm sure Dobby will come down off of his high about the time the wards start to fade back down to normal," Severus observed in a matter of fact tone. "Go enjoy your bath and if he can't manage the magic safely right now, I'll have one of my elves transfigure the clothes for you."

"Thanks. I appreciate that." Rising carefully because his body still ached and his balance wasn't completely adjusted to his new height, the young wizard slowly made his way upstairs. Once in his room, he shrugged out of Severus' robe and laid it carefully on his bed before wandering into the bathroom for a nice long, hot soak.

2:00 P.M.

"You have got to be kidding me," Harry whispered and stared at the new person who was looking back at him from the mirror. Had it really only been two days since he'd looked into this very same mirror and seen a slender, bespectacled, and shorter than average teenage boy? Now he was over six feet tall if looking down a little bit to meet Remus and Severus' gaze was any indication. His shoulders had broadened and his entire body had filled out with wiry muscle that he had a feeling would continue to look deceptively slender under robes. The appearance people tended to expect from him wasn't completely lost as an advantage. His hair was one of the things that really shocked him. Gone was the fly-away sable mop he was used to and in its place was a fall of almost straight, glossy black hair that ended about half way down his back and reflected back occasional flashes of vibrant colour...

"No more glasses, either," he murmured with no small amount of satisfaction and a slightly smug grin. Dressing meticulously in the clothing that he assumed Dobby had left out for him, he returned to the dining room to confront his housemates.

"Are you going to try and tell me that this kind of radical change is normal by any stretch of the imagination?" Arms crossed over his chest, green eyes flashing, Harry looked every bit the young nobleman as he challenged both men with his gaze and tone.

"Some change is fairly common, but no, this degree of change is definitely not what one would usually expect," Severus admitted. "More unusual still is the effect your maturity had on those of us who are bound to you."

"I thought you two looked...younger and healthier than before. Now you look how I would expect a wizard of your age to appear." Harry sighed softly. "So what do we do now? I guess we need to find out if I can still use my current wand or if I will need a new one, but that can wait until tomorrow."

"I would suggest not worrying yourself about it until you cross that bridge," Remus suggested. "If you do need a new wand, we'll go to Ollivander's just as Severus suggested."

“Madam Malkin’s, then Ollivander’s,” Harry corrected quietly. “I have some robes that I need her to make for us and I’d rather not wear transfigured clothing any longer than necessary. I just want to have some clothes that fit hanging up in my closet so I can reach in and grab something without having to think about it.”

“That’s perfectly reasonable and you’ll need things of a better quality than you would normally have,” Severus pointed out. “At the very least you are certain to be the newest Lord Potter and that comes with a great deal of responsibility.”

“He’s talking about political clout and all of that ridiculously fun stuff,” Remus drawled and was surprised by his cub’s amused smirk.

“I have been doing a lot of reading and planning, you two. I’m not going to win this war strictly through brute force, not by a long stretch. Well, the thing between Tom and I might be won by brute magical power, but not my personal conflict with Dumbledore and frankly, the Ministry we have leaves a lot to be desired as a governing body, so...That is almost entirely about political power and knowledge and I’ve got a lot to learn before I can even pretend to think I’m prepared to step out into the political arena against Dumbledore and Fudge.”

August 2nd, Snape Manor, Late evening

Finally clear headed enough to remember that he needed to go out to meet Hedwig in case she had any mail for their shared Master, Dobby tested the slowly calming wards and was able to slide out for the first time in three days. Popping out to the location he had been given, Dobby was greeted by a quiet but tired sounding hoot.

Looking up, the little elf smiled broadly when he recognized the snowy owl. Moving closer, he gestured to coax her down from her perch in a large, old oak.

“Come down, missy Hedwig. Dobby is being here to takes you to Master Harry.”

Hooting her relief, the snowy owl swooped down and landed before the elf with an expectant look. Hooting again, she shifted restlessly as if to urge him to get a move on already.

Laying his hands on the owl and her pile of shrunken packages, Dobby popped them directly to the dining room and relieved Hedwig of her burden before carrying her up to the Owlery.

Wandering into the dining room, Remus paused at the pile of packages and mail that covered a good sized chunk of space on the table top. One letter caught his attention and he picked it up with a wicked grin.

“Hey, Cub! Your O.W.L. results are here!”

“Go ahead and open them,” Harry told him as he wandered in and did his own double take over the pile of stuff on the table. “Well...I guess that means we can go out now...” he commented as a boyish grin grew on his face and he laughed happily. “Presents.”

“You are still such a little boy at times,” Severus observed with a wry chuckle of his own.

“I never really got presents before Hogwarts. I just like getting to open them up and see what’s inside even if I’ll never use it...” Settling into a chair, he pulled the first present to him and shook his head. It looked and felt like a book and the wrapping looked like it was quite expensive. He hefted it and tilted his head to one side before it occurred to him who this particular book was from. “Well colour me shocked...”

“Why are you shocked?” Severus sat down in his usual place opposite Harry and began to worry over the younger man’s wickedly pleased grin. “Who sent you a very expensive looking book shaped present?”

“I’ll know for sure in just a moment,” Harry replied and carefully opened the heavy paper so he could save it. Inside lay a thick, old but unassuming looking tome that reeked of dark magic the moment the

paper was completely pulled away from it. "Yup, this one is from Tom."

"When did you start getting enough books from him to know he is the one who sent it?"

"You wouldn't have let me read them so I didn't tell you I was getting them from him," Harry replied candidly. "So far all he's been sending me is the stuff he studied before he made a play for Dark Lord of the Century and that's mostly rituals and things like that. Since I'm the way I am because of one hell of a ritual, I think I'll pass on using any more, thanks. This book, though...this one I'm not sure about."

Remus slid over to look at the dark brown leather bound book and searched the cover for any sign of lettering; seeing none, he sighed his frustration. The truly old and truly evil works rarely had a visible title since time or discretion had wiped the cover clean.

"Any ideas, Severus? No obvious title, so it could just be really old, but I'm thinking this one never had one on the cover."

"I am inclined to agree with you, Moony. From the feel of it, that book has seen a great deal of use and none of it has been good." Shaking his head, Severus pulled out his wand and cast a detection spell on the tome and was openly surprised when it came up negative. "Harry...just how close are you to the Dark Lord?"

"We talk, we exchange books, we argue and annoy each other and we look forward to the day when we finally get to duel properly," Harry replied with a wry grin. "How close do you think we are, Severus?"

"I think he has a lot of interest in you or that book would have been cursed, as would half of the others..."

"Oh, a lot of them are," Harry countered. "Tom decided I showed a talent for curse breaking when he saw how much I had done in my own mind, so I get to work for what's in those books. He has to get past what I do to the books I send him, too, so don't look at me like that."

“You’re a curse breaker, too?” Remus blurted out, then paused and considered what he knew before commenting again. “I can see that now that I think about it...but still, Cub...please be very cautious...he may be trying to draw you down his path and from everything I remember, he could be very friendly, charming and persuasive when he wanted something.”

“Oh, I’m sure he is trying to seduce me into joining him. I’ve been betrayed by Dumbledore just like he was at this age and I’ve broken free of the old man’s influence, also just like he did. Like it or not, between that and our bond, he isn’t wrong to try to take advantage of a golden opportunity. Unfortunately for him, I’m not taking the hook and he keeps having to bait it back up with better and better temptations.”

“You’re playing him?” Severus sat back with a look of complete disbelief on his face. You, a sixteen year old wizard, are stringing the Dark Lord along like a...a...fan-girl?”

Harry snorted gracelessly and laughed before throwing a disappointed look in the older man’s direction.

“Tom isn’t one to be played, and you know that, Severus. He knows my opinion of him and what he does as well as I know his thoughts on my ideals. Our current understanding is convenient for both of us and it will last only so long as it continues to remain so.”

“Your understanding with Lord Voldemort...you two declared a binding truce, didn’t you...?” Remus started to laugh when Harry threw a surprised look his way. “So what does this little truce entail?”

Too surprised that Remus had figured it out so easily to obfuscate, Harry replied candidly. “He doesn’t directly attack me or send someone after me and I agreed to not go after him for as long as Dumbledore is a mutual problem. Once that problem is resolved, we will re-evaluate the value of continuing our agreement.”

“What of your friends and his Death Eaters? Surely you didn’t leave anything to chance.” The potions master stared into laughing green

eyes and shook his head in open denial. "No protection for his people or your own? Harry..."

"Short of announcing our truce in a press conference, there was no way to guarantee such an agreement would hold and none of his Inner Circle would go for it. He'd have a mutiny on his hands. Besides, he figures I have to practice on someone, so the Death Eaters are fair game if they get in my way and most of them haven't proven to be smart enough to avoid me when they see me. My friends are smart enough to stay out of his way, unless I have greatly underestimated my friends."

"Well, when you put it that way, you do have a valid point. You're the one who has a habit of getting in his way, so they should be fine as long as they stay out of sight when they follow you out after him..." Remus trailed off and shook his head in a silent echo of Severus' earlier action. "You're all going to be in the middle of this mess, so why extend the truce that far if you aren't going to join forces."

Harry laughed aloud and shook his head.

"Remus said it perfectly. Tom and I are not allies; we are enemies who have declared a truce to deal with a common enemy before returning to our own fight. As for being careful, point taken, but don't worry your selves any more than you already do. I was serious when I said that we talk and argue quite a bit and he does push me to study, which I tend to be lazy about..."

"Speaking of being lazy about your studies, how about we take a look at your O.W.L. scores," Remus suggested firmly. "You may not think they're terribly important now, but they might mean more to you in the future."

Sitting back with a long suffering sigh, Harry gestured for the werewolf to go ahead and read the heavy packet of parchment.

"You won't be happy until you find out how I did, so go ahead. Hermione will ask as soon as she finds out I finally got my mail, so I guess it would best if I know."

Opening the envelope with a building sense of anticipation, Remus scanned through the packet and nearly choked when he hit the test scores.

“Bloody hell, Cub...” He read through again and announced Harry’s scores and hit the high points of the attached letters. “Mr. Harry James Potter has achieved an Acceptable in Astronomy, an Outstanding in Magical Creatures, an Exceeds Expectations in Charms, a double Outstanding in...! How the hell did you get a bloody double Outstanding in Defence? I didn’t know that was possible...”

“Defence is easy for me. I was teaching a study group in the subject, so the group did a lot of research and learned a lot that wasn’t on the curriculum. Of course, thanks to Umbitch, there wasn’t much on the curriculum anyway, so that wasn’t much of a stretch...” The teen shrugged. “Beyond that, I don’t know.”

“I’ll take your word for it, Cub. That’s brilliant, though. Okay, where was I...ah! You got an Exceeds Expectations in Divination, an Exceeds Expectations in Herbology...” Remus sniggered before reading off the next grade. “A Dreadful in History of Magic and you got Exceeds Expectations in both Potions and Transfiguration. Oh...here we go...an explanation on your Defence score. This score counts as two OWLs and is thusly ranked due to the fact that you have scored the highest Defence Against The Dark Arts score in approximately 50 years. The previous record was held by Tom Marvolo Riddle, class of 1945. Your DADA work is easily at NEWT standards and you should be very proud of this achievement.”

“I beat out Tom on his Defence score! Oh, that’s one I’m going to have to share!” Harry chortled his delight. “That’s great, though. Now ‘Mione won’t ride my case so hard about my grades...maybe...”

“Minerva made note that she’s pleased with your scores and that your ban on Quidditch has been lifted, Mr. candidate for Captain of Team Gryffindor,” Remus teased gently. “If you go back, you might want to consider playing...you love to fly and the Harry everyone knows would jump at the chance to be back on the team.”

"I...you're right," the teen sighed. "If I go back to Hogwarts, then I'm trying to run under Dumbledore's notice and refusing to play Quidditch would send up all sorts of red sparks. It's not like I'd turn down the chance to fly circles around Malfoy, anyway, so yeah, I'll play."

"Well, here are the letters so you can send your class selections to Minerva. Maybe that way you'll get your supply list before school starts."

"Funny werewolf. Yeah." Tucking the letters back into their envelope, Harry refocused on the book he'd received from Tom and smiled a little. "I have presents to worry about right now." Moving on to another book shaped package, he shook his head and opened it just as carefully. "Oh, I do love 'Mione...an updating copy of Wizengamot proceedings...this thing has the Minutes and everything in it. Brilliant!"

"Hermione is a very astute young lady," Remus mused.

"Don't even begin to go back to your pranking on that subject, Harry," Severus stated firmly. "Or at least do so when I am not here to be caught in the middle of your improper joking."

"Oh, alright, if you're going to be that way about it..." Opening a box of sweets from Molly, a 'care package' from the Twins, a book on Seeker tactics from Ron and Ginny, a book on the etiquette and responsibilities of Lordship over a family from Neville and a necklace with a winged snake pendant on it from Luna, Harry sat back with a happy smile. Everything he'd received meant something to him and all of it would be used and loved. "They're perfect."

"The gifts or your friends?" Remus inquired with a wry chuckle.

"Hmm? Well, the gifts definitely are and my friends are most of the time, I guess. No one can be perfect all of the time...that would be terribly boring, don't you think?" Carefully folding all of the wrapping paper, Harry pulled his first present of the evening over and inspected it more closely. He opened it before the two over-protective men could stop him.

“Pro vos est semita ut immortalis. Insisto diligenter lest is cado a subter supter vos.” Harry arched an eyebrow and looked up at his mentors. “Before you is the path to immortality. Tread carefully lest it fall away from beneath you. I did get the gist of that, right? I get the idea that the path disintegrated right out from under good old Tom and he’s hoping I’ll succeed where he failed.”

“With your bond being much more...intense, success for you could easily translate to success for him, if only because his death might drag you down.”

Harry nodded quietly.

“I know. This one goes with some of the others Dobby got from Borgin...if it makes you feel any better, I do have a whole book shelf dedicated to books I won’t go near.”

“Yes, that does make me feel better,” Severus drawled sarcastically.

August 3rd, Diagon Alley, Gringotts Bank

10:00 A.M.

“Before we get into the wills and inheritance issues, I do have one thing to ask,” Harry began. “I need to know if you know anything about rituals rooms and how to restore them if they’ve been destroyed...”

“Destroyed? I sincerely doubt the room has been destroyed, but describe the damage,” Ragnok replied calmly. “We have Rune Masters who are more than capable of creating Ritual working rooms. I’m sure they can handle a few repairs.”

“The room is several inches larger on all sides, including the ceiling and floor, as best I can tell,” Severus stated. “I can’t tell you too much about the details because I get a headache every time I try to go inside. The damn thing is still so heavily charged that I don’t know when we’ll be able to do anything to it.” He turned to Harry. “It isn’t

necessary for you to do this. You're the first person to use the bloody room in close to fifty years."

"What if I need it again? What if we need to use it again?" Harry sighed softly and shook his head. "It was my maturity that damaged the room. I'll see to it that it is useable again."

Unable to argue in the face of Harry's logic and reasons for why he wanted to restore the room, the potions master nodded reluctantly and returned to his conversation with Ragnok.

"The room has been stripped of carvings, leaving only smooth black stone on the inside."

"The home that contains the room, where is it located? There are many such rooms that were crafted by the Goblins centuries ago and knowing which one it is and if it is indeed one of ours, would make the restoration go much more smoothly. That it is still charged is of great benefit to the Rune Master, since he will use that power to fuel his work." The grizzled old Chieftain sat forward eagerly.

"The estate lies approximately sixty miles south of Hogsmeade and about the same west of Balfarg," Severus murmured quietly as if he feared saying even the approximate location would allow everyone he didn't want to know of it to find it. "Prince Manor was in my mother's family for a long time; as far as I know it always was."

"You called it Snape Manor before," Harry commented dryly.

"Of course I did. I live there now, and I'll call my home whatever I wish to call it," the older wizard grumbled. "Its proper name is still Prince Manor."

"It is in the wild areas outside Balfarg, yes? In an area where the mists rarely settle, even on hot, sunny days?" Ragnok went quiet and suddenly adopted a very formal air when Severus nodded his agreement. "The Goblin people would be willing to restore your ritual room if you would be willing to grant us the use of it once, perhaps twice per year."

“Why would you want to use it? It’s just a ritual room...isn’t it?” Severus was getting an unexpected insight into the potential value of something he had taken for granted and was left feeling a bit confused.

“Just a ritual room?” Ragnok chuckled roughly. “That room may well be one that was designed as a holy place for my people; a temple, if you will. It is located on a node, after all. If it is the room I believe it to be, then it was carved from a single block of near flawless obsidian that was moved to that place through great effort on the part of my people. It took the Rune Masters nearly fifty years to complete the work to their satisfaction, or so our manuscripts tell us. The manor house known to you as Prince or Snape Manor was originally intended to be a much larger complex. Its construction was begun around the time that Hogwarts’ first stones were being laid but it was never completed. The partial structure was captured by the An Tiarna clan, a large family of what we believe were Druids that came out of Ireland and it apparently was eventually passed on through the Prince line. This is a magnificent opportunity for both the goblins and yourself, Potions Master.”

“I...I don’t see why we couldn’t come to an arrangement regarding your use of the room,” Severus stated, eyes a little wide as the information sank in. “When would be the best time to do the restoration?”

“You say it is still too charged for you to comfortably enter the room?” Ragnok beamed when the wizard rubbed his forehead and grimaced. Taking that as an affirmative, the elder goblin nodded. “If you are amenable, then I can have a Rune Master and helpers ready to go when we have concluded our business here with Lord Potter. The work will take several days. Will it be an imposition to have a small crew of Goblins in your home for that time?”

“It will be no imposition, Chieftain Ragnok. I’m sure Harry will appreciate the chance to practice his accent on your crew.” Severus smirked at the green eyed teen and shrugged.

“Ah, yes, Griphook tells me you have begun the sixth book in the series we gave you. How is that coming along?” Ragnok arched one very hairy eyebrow at the much changed teenager.

“It is going very well, muukuugaal sheklac.” Harry smiled with his teeth bared in a classically goblin smile, then laughed when Griphook sat back and grinned like a proud father. “I very much enjoyed having an insight into my ancestor’s thoughts and opinions.”

“It is good to know your history, Harry. Shall we move on to the inheritance potions now? I am certain you wish to know your blood.” Griphook grinned toothily.

“Yes, I am definitely ready. What do I need to do?”

Laying out two large sheets of darker than usual parchment out on the large table, Griphook nodded his satisfaction and slid two potions vials and a slender, sharp looking blade across to the young heir.

“These two vials have very specific purposes. One will give us a complete family tree for your blood lineage as well as showing highlighted lines where you may have inherited due to a terminating line. The other potion will list out your specific eligibilities so we know which heir rings and wills to make available to you.”

Harry fidgeted eagerly and sat forward to pull the two vials and the blade more within reach.

“Okay. I’m following you so far, although I don’t understand how a potion can do all of that...”

“Magic, Harry,” Ragnok teased through a wicked looking grin.

“Right...” Harry sighed.

“You will need to open each vial and let seven drops of your blood fall into the potion before recapping it. Keep the vials in your hands because we will be waiting for them to grow warm. Once they are comfortably heated in your hand, pour each one separately onto one of the two sheets of parchment. After that, we simply have to wait for

the potion to run its course.” Griphook sat back and sighed. He had a feeling this was going to be a long day.

“We will call for food once the potions have been poured,” Ragnok declared. “Nothing more can be done until they are complete.”

“Even though you know I’m the Potter heir, we still have to wait until this is done?” Harry frowned.

“Your mother requested this process her self and stated that no further proceedings should be allowed until these two potions had been used.”

“Oh...and I thought I was getting to be a little paranoid...” Laughing a little, Harry shrugged and uncapped the potions. Holding them in his right hand, he offered his left to Severus with the blade held between his thumb and forefinger. “Would you mind doing the honours, Severus? It will be quicker and less messy this way.”

Grasping the younger wizard’s hand, Severus made a careful cut on the pad of the teen’s ring finger so he could still squeeze it for more blood using his thumb. Releasing his grip, he nodded for him to proceed.

“Seven drops?” Harry confirmed and carefully added his blood to the first potion before moving on to the second. Each drop hit with a barely audible hiss that drew the attention of both goblins and older wizards, their eyes widening as the potions rapidly darkened and seemed to swirl with an inner fire.

Once the potions were capped, Remus sneezed and rubbed his nose, amber eyes studying Harry intently. Sneezing again, he gave voice to his curiosity.

“Did you know your blood was poisonous?”

“It is?” Harry stared at the werewolf with a rather confused look on his face. “What are you going on about, Moony?”

"Your blood smells of poison, Imp, strong poison. Maybe we should have that tested to make sure you're not going to have any problems further down the line," Remus pointed out with a slightly less amused look and then noted the way his cub seemed to be warming his hands on the vials he was rolling back and forth between his palms. "Are they warm yet?"

"Hmm? Oh, yes, quite hot, actually...like a cup of tea...I should pour them now, I suppose." Looking to Griphook for confirmation, Harry poured one onto the parchment on his left and then poured the other on the right hand parchment. "So, now we eat?" he asked hopefully. "I guess I shouldn't be surprised to have you tell me my blood smells poisonous. It just wasn't something I noticed. I did dream that the Basilisk was in my blood, so..."

"Yes, now we eat and have the vials properly destroyed so that no one can use your blood against you." Griphook interrupted as gently as any goblin was likely to do and shot a glance at his chieftain.

"That is correct," Ragnok agreed and filed the potion's reaction away as one more bit of interesting information about the young wizard sitting a few seats down from him.

"Relax, gentlemen. This could take a little while."

Glancing over the parchments once he was done eating, Harry found his name at the bottom of the family tree and was soon thoroughly engrossed in his study of the convoluted document.

"Dad's family looks pretty normal," he whispered, fingers tracing lines of descent as he muttered to himself. Oblivious to the amusement he was causing his companions, he continued to ignore them completely. "Mom's mum didn't marry...naughty girl...oh, hold on now...no, no, NO! No way am I dealing with this right now!"

"No way what, Cub?" Stifling his chuckles over Harry's scandalized and almost angry look, Remus tried to look encouraging and only managed to set the teen off.

“I refuse to acknowledge the situation right now,” Harry stated in a flustered tone and rolled the chart up tightly. “If you can figure out what I’m going nutters about once we get home, then I’ll talk about it, but not a moment sooner. I think I’ll have a look at the other parchment...it has to be less traumatizing...”

He tucked the genealogy away into his outer cloak and focused on the second parchment with Ragnok and Griphook looking on. Glancing up, he caught their curious, almost eager expressions and groaned.

“Am I going to hate this, too?”

“We have no way of knowing that, young one. Why don’t you find out for yourself?” Ragnok suggested.

“Yeah, that would be the easiest way to handle it...” Harry pulled the other parchment over and closed his eyes in a search for calm before opening them and starting in on the less intricate document.

Titles and Bloodlines

Sire

Lord of The Noble and Most Ancient House of Potter

Bloodlines - Human Wizard

Lord of The Noble and Most Ancient House of Gryffindor

Bloodlines - Human Wizard

Dame

Lord of The Noble and Most Ancient House of Evans

Bloodlines – Human Wizard, Bloodline Obscured

Heir to The Exalted Line of Myrridin

Bloodlines – Bloodline Unknown

Secondary Sire

Lord of The Noble and Most Ancient House of Black

Bloodlines – Human Wizard, Bloodline Obscured

Lord of The Noble and Most Ancient House of Slytherin

Bloodlines – Human Wizard

Secondary Sire

Bloodlines – Human Wizard, Lycanthrope species: Wolf.

Secondary Sire

Heir to the Noble House of Prince

Bloodlines – Human Wizard, Dark Sidhe

Descendent of the Ancient Serpent Xerestes

Descendent of the Ancient Phoenix Fawkes

Legal Documents

The Will of James Malachi Potter and Lily Marie Evans-Potter
(Returned to Pending Status)

The Will of Sirius Orion Black (Pending)

The Will of Ambrosias Reginald Evans (Pending)

The Will of Thomas Marvolo Riddle (Pending)

“What does it mean to have an obscured bloodline?” Harry asked as calmly as possible. “I understand unknown bloodline well enough, although I think that disturbs me more than the other option...”

"You have an unknown? For which of us? It could be the werewolf," Remus suggested.

"Nope, the lycanthrope species, werewolf is listed quite clearly," Harry mused. "The two that are obscured are in the Evans and Black lines. The unknown is in the Myrridin line. That's all the Myrridin line says...Bloodline unknown. The two that are obscured at least say Human Wizard first. Apparently Severus is part Dark Sidhe, whatever the bloody hell that means...other than the fact that I am also partly Dark Sidhe...I guess."

"An obscured line usually occurs when a family has gone to great lengths, usually through blood magic, to hide evidence of non-human bloodlines in their heritage. Your Ministry wouldn't even see that notation. You are seeing it because we have a much more powerful potion that is very focused on ferreting such things out." Ragnok grinned at the stunned potions master and offered an explanation to the question of his own interesting discovery. "There were believed to be two groups of Eldar, or ancient elves. The Sidhe, or Light elves and the Dark Sidhe...dark cousins to the beautiful, nature and music loving Sidhe. The Dark Sidhe were drawn to dark places, much like we goblins prefer our caverns and tunnels and had a strong affinity to the darker aspects of magic. They were usually sable to black in hair colour and had very dark eyes. It would seem that the apple did not fall far from the potion master's tree."

Harry sat back and studied a lightly blushing Severus Snape while he contemplated what the Black's and Evans' could have wanted to hide so badly. There weren't any bloodlines that were that awful, were there?

"I can kind of understand it with the Blacks and their 'always pure' thing, but what would the Evans' be hiding? Is there a way to find out?" He grinned at the discomfited potions master. "Don't let it bother you, Severus. You only had one thing hiding in your woodpile. I have at least two that may have been embarrassing or bad enough for the Evans and Blacks to try and hide them the hard way..."

"Of course there's a way to find out," Griphook replied with a sheepish look. "You wait and see if anything manifests that can be attributed to a magical bloodline. Wizards don't make a lot of sense to goblins when it comes to what is embarrassing, so I can't be much help there, either."

"Great. I had a feeling you were going to say that." Harry sat and fumed while the goblins went about the business of organizing the wills that he needed to hear. He looked over at Remus and Severus and sighed heavily. "I'm tired of asking why I don't get to be normal. I'm done trying to be something I'm not. If they," he gestured towards the outside and the rest of the wizarding population. "Can't handle who I am, they can fix the rest of their nasty little problems on their own."

"Cub..." Remus trailed off into a sigh when he saw how serious Harry was about his comments, at least for now.

"Did you look at the wills that are listed?" Severus handed the page back to Harry having not really paid much attention to their conversation once he'd seen one entry in particular.

"Obviously not if you're looking at me like I'm going to explode," Harry replied sarcastically. "Oh...that's got to be wrong. Tom is alive and kicking. If anyone would know, it's me. I can't be the Heir of Slytherin either...Tom's the heir." He shook his head and frowned at the offending parchment.

"Which will are you disputing, Harry? They only show up if the person who wrote the will has, indeed, died." Ragnok eyed the one Harry was pointing to and arched one bushy brow. "Mr. Riddle died on October 31st, 1981. Tell me how he supposedly came back to the living and maybe I can clarify things for you just a bit."

"There was a ritual...umm, bone of the father, flesh of the servant which was Peter Pettigrew and blood of the enemy forcibly taken, which was mine."

"Ah. Well, that ritual could, indeed, have given Voldemort a new body," Ragnok agreed. "But it couldn't have given him the same body

that was his the night he died in 1981. If nothing else, he had no part of his mother in the mix, so he is actually more related to you and this Pettigrew than his original self. Tom Riddle as the wizarding world once knew him is quite indisputably dead.”

“Can I have a piece of parchment and quill? And some ink? I have to work something out.” Harry accepted the requested items and began to quickly write out several points on the page, only to return and add notes with a building sense of excitement. Sitting back, he started to laugh uproariously. Jumping up out of his chair, he pumped both fists at the ceiling and whooped out his joy.

“I’m free!”

Picking up the parchment, Severus paled as soon as he began to read – he knew what this was. He had, after all, heard it all those many years ago. Getting past the prophecy itself, he actually read Harry’s notes and could find no way to refute his logic. A smile turned up the corners of his mouth before his own harsh laugh joined Harry’s. Handing the parchment on to Remus, he sat back to watch Harry enjoying his sense of reprieve and his own freedom to be able to laugh.

The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches...

(Okay, this is pretty obvious. On to the next line...)

Born to those who have thrice defied him, born as the seventh month dies...

(I know Dumbledore had to have focused on Order members for this, and there were apparently only two pregnant women who had defied Tom three times, so it narrowed the field down considerably for him. Taking into account the rivalry between Tom and Albus, it kind of makes sense even now that an Order member would be the one, too. As far as the date, well, July 31st is when the month dies. Aren’t I just the lucky birthday boy?)

And the Dark Lord will mark him as his equal, but he will have power the Dark Lord knows not...

(Lightning bolt curse scar, assumed as meaning that Tom had marked me as his equal, check. Power from an obscure and ancient ritual performed by Mum and the gang being something Tom didn't know about, check.)

And either must die at the hand of the other for neither can live while the other survives...

(Tom cast Avada Kedavra, it bounced off me and hit him. I lived. He floated around as a ghost for over 10 years and last I checked there is only one way to become a ghost...you have to die. Point being, he's passed on! He ceased to be! He kicked the bucket! He became an Ex-Dark Lord!)

The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord will be born as the seventh month dies...

(After that it just gets repetitive. This prophecy was fulfilled October 31st, 1981. Take a look at it. Think it over. I have a feeling you'll see that Dumbledore is the only one still clinging to this old thing as an excuse to make me fight his war for him a second time.)

Remus felt like he couldn't breathe when he first realized he was reading the prophecy that had led to the deaths of two of his best friends and the misery that he, Sirius, Severus and Harry had lived through during the following years. Sucking in a deep lungful of air, he realized his Cub was very likely right – he was free of this prophecy's hold. It was dead and gone.

"Cub...are you sure? Voldemort is still alive..."

"Voldemort is, yes," Harry agreed. "But if I understand Ragnok correctly, then Tom Marvolo Riddle died the same night my parents did. The spirit may be the same, but the man is not."

"For once I have no desire to refute what you call logic, Harry. If you're content to lay the prophecy to bed, then I am more than happy to do the same." Severus shrugged when Remus threw him a surprised look. "Do you want it to still be active?"

"No, no, not at all...I just want to be sure. Albus obviously hasn't seen it the way you have, Cub."

"That old bastard and his damned bird club have made my entire life a living hell because they've been running around thinking a sixteen plus year old prophecy is still waiting to be fulfilled!" Harry declared as he composed himself and returned to his seat. "When the time is right, he is going to pay for what he's done if I don't kill him first. For the first time since he told me about that thrice damned prophecy, I feel like I can breathe again. I mean, I know that Tom and I are going to have to finish what was started between us, but it's just us now. No more prophecy hanging...Ragnok...why are you looking at me like that? Is there a prophecy I don't know about yet?"

"There is a prophecy," the elderly goblin admitted reluctantly. "But it is very personal to the goblin people. We do not permit our prophecies to be shared outside..."

"Does it say I have to kill someone for you?"

"There is only a Chosen child who will bring about great change for our world, young Lord. It does not mention any specific actions or requirements on how that change is made to happen."

"I can live with that, Ragnok. I just hope things don't go badly," Harry mused. "Things have a way of turning strange when I get involved..."

"Isn't that just a little bit of an underestimation there?" Remus asked under his breath and looked at the four scrolls with no small amount of personal trepidation. "Here you go, Cub. Run now and you just might get a shot at being normal. Hang around and you'll be Lord Potter, along with several other titles..."

"I already told you my opinion on that, Moony. I'm done with trying to have what everyone else calls a normal life. This is normal for me..." Harry trailed off as he realized he was about to hear his parent's will.

"But this is the hard part, too...the hardest part ever...I get to hear their words and never know the voices that should have spoken to

me...I get to have the wealth and titles without ever having had what would have been worth a hundred times more..." Swiping at his eyes, the young Lord fought for his composure and finally won the battle. Letting out a slow breath, he shook himself and focused on his companions and gave them only a cool, disinterested mask that would have made any Slytherin proud.

Seeing that mask hurt Severus in a way he couldn't express even as it did, indeed, make him proud. He wore a similar look himself when all he wanted was for Harry to be able to cry for his parents and Sirius and everything else he had lost during his short life. This young man would rarely, if ever, have the luxury of being the vulnerable boy they had just barely gotten a glimpse of and he knew there would eventually be a price to pay for those who had made that truth a reality.

"Which is first, the wills or the rings?" the potions master asked quietly.

"The rings come first," Griphook explained. "Despite what the potion shows, it is the heir ring that makes the final determination about who will take Lordship over a family. If a ring causes you pain or makes any sort of defensive reaction like stinging or burning, take it off immediately. We will still read any applicable parts of the will that might apply to a descendent, but not the Lord himself."

"Okay, so this determines my level of inheritance as well as my, what, level of responsibility to the family?" Harry tilted his head to one side inquisitively.

"That is very astute, young one. You are correct. If you are accepted by all six rings, then you will have responsibility as Lord to a great number of people." Ragnok studied the barely sixteen year old boy who met his gaze openly and without fear and nodded. "We will know shortly."

"I guess it's a good thing I have that saving people thing...okay. Which one do I try on first?"

“This is the first. I will tell you which one it is once it has accepted or denied you,” Griphook stated. “That way you cannot bias your own reactions.”

“Alright...” A gentle rush of power burst through Harry’s body as he slid the first ring onto the first finger of his left hand. Gasping softly, eyes closed, he basked in the welcoming sensation that washed over him as soon as the ring was completely on his finger. Soaking it all in with a contented sigh, he settled into a much more relaxed posture than he had been in since arriving at Gringotts that day.

“Wow. That was better than a Molly-hug...”

Griphook chuckled and placed another ring box in front of the young Lord.

“The rings tend to be very welcoming to their rightful Heir. That was the Potter ring and here is the next one.” He threw a sardonic grin at the two men who were hovering so protectively near the young Noble.

Reassured by the close presence of Remus and Severus, Harry opened his eyes and slid on the second ring. Greeted with another rush of power, this one dark and secretive, he shuddered delicately as it brought to mind the forbidden pleasures of the Dark Revel and Dark Magic in general.

“The Most Ancient and Noble House of Black,” he whispered and licked his lips. “Talk about dark power...” He savoured the familiar, definitely sensual feelings this power evoked, and then reluctantly opened his eyes once more. “That felt naughty...”

Chortling his amusement, Remus just shook his head and shrugged.

“I somehow think that Sirius would have said something like that had he been given the opportunity to try the ring on.”

“You think so, eh? Cool. Next?”

“Incorrigible,” Severus muttered. “So, that’s Potter and Black. Which family is this next one?”

"This is the next signet," Griphook replied. "Their coat of arms uses the Dire Wolf, as opposed to a natural Wolf."

"Dire Wolf, huh? Okay." The ring went on and Harry felt something inside himself shatter, followed by a scalding hot wave of power so dense he didn't even have a chance to cry out in surprise before he was slumped unconscious on the in his chair, body sprawled partway on the table.

"Harry!" Remus and Severus moved towards the incapacitated teenager and were stopped by Ragnok's urgent words.

"No! Do not touch him! His magic has been unbound in some way and he could hurt you accidentally," Ragnok explained. "Surely you felt the binding shatter?"

"Is that what that was? I heard a sound, like breaking glass," Severus murmured. "Why would someone put such a powerful binding on a child's magic?"

"It may not have been one that was specifically placed on him," Ragnok replied. "There are special gifts and powers available only to the head of certain family lines. The Evan's line apparently carries an extra reserve of power that can only be unlocked by the ring when one assumes Lordship."

"So he really is a pureblood. Isn't this going to raise all sorts of fun issues," Remus whispered.

"Apparently so..." Harry stirred and opened his eyes to slits. "Mmrph, I feel like I got hit by the bloody Knight Bus...what happened?"

"A powerful block on your magical reserves was shattered when you donned the Evan's crest," Griphook answered. "It looks like you are, indeed, a pureblood wizard."

"I can't wait for the chance to smack Draco with that one...but it'll have to wait. Damn the luck. Oh well. Next?"

“This ring we waited for until you had been accepted by the Evan’s crest,” Ragnok replied. “Do not bother to sit up, young Lord. This ring may cause a similar reaction if it acknowledges you.”

Harry eyed the signet, the eagle suspiciously reminding him of something he’d seen during history class about World War two. He put it on and clawed at the table’s smooth surface as his back bowed and further bindings shattered. The rush of power that this ring filled him up with felt at least as dark as the power from the Black ring and left him with the intoxicating rush he had come to associate with his more daring adventures in flight. Panting softly, he blinked up into the faces of two very concerned wizards.

“Who did that one belong to? I feel like I just pulled off the best Wronski Feint ever...”

“That was Lord Evan’s personal ring...”

Still filled with the dark rush of the ring’s effect on him, Harry turned a cold, snake-like glare on Griphook before frowning at him with a slow shake of his head.

“Now is not the time to play coy, Griphook. Yes, it was the personal ring of the late Lord Evans, but only once he was better known as The Dark Lord Grindelwald.”

Griphook sighed expressively and nodded after sharing a glance with Ragnok.

“You are, of course, correct. I did not know if you wished to share this information with your godfathers. It is not a commonly known fact that Lord Evans and Grindelwald were one and the same man.”

“Yeah. I can appreciate that, I guess.” Lying passively against the cool surface of the table, Harry searched his body and magic for any sign of injury or threat and found none. “This getting knocked on my ass by these rings is not cool. What did that one do to me?” he asked in a slightly growlier tone than usual. Despite feeling incredibly energized and wide awake, something told him it would be best to stay where he was until the buzzing sensation in his core had faded

somewhat. "I feel like I have a hive of angry hornets running around in my core."

"Apparently the Evans line had several latent power reserves on top of the obscured magical heritage that was bound until you donned the rings. Because these heritages are obscured or unknown to our magic, we have no way of telling you what has been unlocked and if you should expect anything from them in the future." Ragnok sounded decidedly unhappy about the whole issue and made that fact known. "We will research into these issues and let you know if we are able to find anything. This is the first time we have encountered such a lack in our resources and I will see to it that that oversight is corrected."

"That would be very good," Harry replied and stretched until his back popped. "Okay, that was four rings. I have how many left?"

"Just two more, Cub. Do you want to wait?" Remus shoved his hands in his pockets to curb the temptation to touch his Cub to reassure himself that he was truly unharmed. As disturbing as it was to find out that Harry was the heir to Grindelwald, it was a discussion that could wait until they got home and had time to consider all of the implications with a clear and open mind.

"No, let's get it over with. I'm not moving until my core calms down anyway." The young Lord turned his head to look at the goblins and sighed. "Next?"

Griphook shook his head and carried the last two ring boxes over to Harry.

"Here is the next ring."

"Okay. It should be interesting to see what happens with this one," Harry mused.

"Hopefully nothing as interesting as the last two," Severus drawled, obsidian eyes full of nervous energy. Between his discovery of his own chequered heritage and the reactions these rings were causing,

he was certain he was going to have grey hair before they were done for the day.

"I second that motion," Remus muttered.

Ignoring his mentor's grumblings for the moment, the green eyed teen slid the Gryffindor ring on and arched a little as his pulse raced and his skin flushed with the adrenalin rush of excitement and danger so very much like what he had felt during the events in the Department of Mysteries.

"So much for bloody well calming down," he muttered under his breath and tried – uselessly – to come down off of the high the ring had left him with. "The last one is Slytherin, right?"

"That is correct, Harry" Griphook offered the ring with a slight grimace of concern. He had never heard of a wizarding heir having so much difficulty with the gifts the rings unlocked and prior to developing a tentative friendship with Harry, he didn't think he would have cared how bad it was. He offered the ring despite his concern because there was nothing else he could do.

Harry eyed the graceful, serpentine S that was Salazar's crest before sliding the Slytherin ring onto the third finger on his left hand. He relaxed visibly and sighed his contentment as a cooling calm settled over him, leaving him with the vaguely remembered sensation of being cradled in the coils of the Basilisk during his maturity.

"Oh, that's so much better...the buzzing isn't so bad now..."

"So Merlin's line doesn't have a ring, then?" Remus sat forward, his curiosity and relief clearly evident.

"No, Myrridin's line does not have a ring. There are other methods of proving such an inheritance, thus making a ring nothing more than a pretty adornment," Ragnok stated as if he preferred it that way. "We still have the wills to attend to, Harry. Are you able to continue?"

"If I can survive a Basilisk at twelve, I can handle a few wills," Harry declared and slowly sat up. Shifting to stand briefly without

assistance, he popped his back again and was just settling into his seat when the Goblins regained their composure.

“You fought a Basilisk at the age of twelve! We had not heard of this battle,” Ragnok stated. “Your battles against Voldemort and the trials of the Tri-Wizard tournament we learned of through various sources. Tell us of the death of the great serpent?”

“A friend of mine was possessed by Tom Riddle’s diary and he made her open the Chamber of Secrets,” Harry murmured and let that memory take him deep inside himself. “Another friend discovered it was a Basilisk and we...Ron and I went down into the Chamber along with Lockhart...there was a cave in and I was the only one who went on.” He shook his head and sighed. “She was a beautiful snake...but Tom already had control of her and she was trying to kill me. Fawkes clawed her eyes out so she couldn’t kill or petrify me and the Sorting Hat gave me the Sword of Gryffindor.”

“Was it a young serpent?” Griphook asked eagerly. There wasn’t a goblin alive who didn’t cheer over the death of a Basilisk. Just one running loose in their tunnels could mean the death of an entire clan... “Was it a big one?”

“Young? No, she was at least sixty feet long and over a thousand years old. I stabbed her through the roof of her mouth with the sword when she came in to bite me. As it was, she still almost killed me,” Harry stated and drew an eighteen inch long, gently curved piece of what looked to be ivory that was stained at both ends with dark black and the brownish red of blood out of his robes. Laying it on the table, he let his fingers linger along its length in a regretful caress before he spoke again and bared his right bicep so all four could see the smooth, white, perfectly round scar the fang had given him. “This fang pierced my upper arm and hit the bone as she died. If Fawkes hadn’t been there to cry in the wound, I would have died. I used the broken fang to stab Riddle’s diary and his memory was destroyed.”

Remus stared at the innocuous looking piece of ivory and shuddered back into his seat. He’d heard the story and seen the scar, but nothing made it as real as seeing that fang and smelling the venom. Blinking, he raised his gaze to Harry’s face and filed his curiosity

about the similarity in the scents of his blood and the basilisk venom for another time. A glance at Severus showed the snarky man to be just as visibly affected by this tangible presentation of evidence.

“Most impressive,” Ragnok murmured, eyes filled with a new level of respect. This young man was not like the usual wizards they had to deal with – he was a warrior and that was something any goblin could understand and appreciate. “Why do you mourn the serpent?”

“I am a Parselmouth. If she hadn’t been controlled by Tom, I might have gained a powerful ally...maybe even another friend...”

“Ah. Very well.” Ragnok clapped his hands together once and picked up the first will. “As primary beneficiary for these wills, you are entitled to hear them in their entirety, but if you would prefer it, I can read only that which pertains to you and give you copies to review when you have the time to do so.”

“I’d prefer the short version for now and I’d like to have copies,” Harry confirmed and tried to settle in as comfortably as possibly for the morbid business of four will readings. The Potter will didn’t hit him as hard as he had expected, but knowing that he now had letters from both parents to read when he returned home left him with a tight feeling in his chest that refused to go away. Hearing that Remus had been left a substantial amount of galleons and a cottage just outside of Hogsmeade made him smile at the werewolf even as his blood boiled over at this blatant display of Dumbledore’s duplicity and disregard for the well being of others. “Did you ever discover for certain if it was Dumbledore who messed about with my parent’s will?”

“We did, which is why it was returned to pending status. The goblin that processed the request accepted a large sum for his services and has been tried by our council. He was put to death,” Ragnok replied. “We are still gathering information on Dumbledore’s various activities. It is a mystery to me how he has managed to remain unnoticed for these last fifteen years. I admit that he is subtle, but even the most subtle will eventually make mistakes or errors in judgement...”

“We wish we knew for certain, Ragnok. Merlin knows, we would love to know all of the details,” Severus replied. “I would hate to think that the wizarding people are such trusting sheep that they wouldn’t notice...but it appears they may well be...and he has clearly begun to make those very errors or we wouldn’t have found out this much.”

“Even the goblins did not notice the more specific details until a certain young man started asking a lot of uncomfortable questions, but yes, you are quite correct. We are able to find these errors now that we know to look for them,” Griphook murmured. “Are we ready to move on to the next will?”

“Sirius,” Harry whispered and nodded for Ragnok to continue. The wry and often ribald humour of the dead Marauder’s final words made Harry smile and added to the sparse list of memories he had of the wild and unpredictable man. Like his parent’s will, this one washed over him gently and he wondered if he might have a breakdown later once everything sank in. Right now none of it seemed nearly as devastating as he had thought it would be when the subject originally came up. He noted the details of the Evan’s will and was soon reeling from the sheer volume of information and money involved in the three wills he’d heard so far.

“Great Merlin, please tell me there isn’t much more,” Harry groaned and threw a pleading look at both of the goblins. “I’ve lost count of how many vaults I’m supposed to go look at as it is...”

“Oh, stop your whining and deal with it, brat,” Severus growled at the now grinning teenager. “It’s only twelve vaults and more money than you could spend with all of your little friends helping for the rest of your life.”

“Is that all? Well, that isn’t so bad...” Harry sighed and stretched gracefully. “What did I get from Tom and how exactly did I wind up inheriting from him? It still doesn’t make sense to me why I would be listed as his heir.”

“Well, let me read you the will and then you might understand a little better.” Getting a nod from Harry, Ragnok opened the last scroll and began to read. Before he had gotten too far into it, the young wizard

had already started laughing and he had to pause to let him calm down. "Are you alright, Harry?"

"Oh yeah, I'm wonderful, but Tom is going to be pissed as all hell when he finally realizes that he can't get to his vault because a certain annoying someone has inherited it away from him." Grinning like a maniac, Harry wiped away tears of laughter and sighed. "What an unfortunate event for Tom...I'm sorry, Ragnok. Go right ahead and finish what you have to read. I promise to control myself."

Still grinning, the green eyed wizard contemplated how to break the news to Tom without starting a too big of a fight. As it stood, he was fairly certain they might have something new to fight about in the near future. It was clever to will everything to the next Heir of Slytherin in case he did die. At least then he had some idea of what kind of person might get the vault even though he was intending to be the one to inherit from him self...

Finally done with the wills and all of the attendant paperwork, Harry sat forward and pulled the Basilisk fang forward so he could feel it in his hands.

"Do you have a listing of all of the people that need to be contacted now that I've become the Lord of four major families and if so, can you send out notifications to them so I can get a feel for how many I need to arrange meetings with?"

"For a fee, we can do that and arrange for space for you to hold your meetings should it become an issue," Ragnok stated. "Shall we say five galleons per notification?"

"How many notifications?"

"A minimum of one hundred, possibly a considerable number more depending on how far back you wish us to go and depending on how many are still alive to receive a notification," Ragnok explained.

"What do you mean by how far I want you to go back?" Harry sat forward, eyes full of curiosity.

“How far back in your relations,” Griphook clarified. “Cousins, nieces and nephews...how far back?”

“Oh...” Glancing over at his mentors and godfathers, Harry arched an eyebrow at them. “Does cousin seem far enough to go back, reasonably speaking? Should I limit it to first cousin...second?”

“First or second cousin should give you anyone closely enough related to have any interest in the family politics,” Remus commented.

“And it keeps you from bringing in half of the wizarding world,” Severus drawled with an amused smirk. “Limit it to first cousin if you’re smart.”

“First cousin it is, then,” Harry stated to Ragnok. “Unless they are a member of a terminating line and have no one else to turn to for familial support.”

“Very well. That gives us our lines within which to work,” Ragnok stated. “This could easily be more than several hundred notifications, however.”

“Make it ten per notification, then and send me a list of who has been contacted,” Harry stated. “Since I don’t have to worry about anyone finding out who the new Lord is with it in your capable hands, it is well worth the galleons.”

Smiling broadly, both goblins nodded approvingly. Ragnok chuckled and shook his grizzled, bald head.

“Very good, young Lord. Now that we have all of these stuffy formalities out of the way, would you like to see your vaults?”

“That would be brilliant! Will you be taking us down in the cart or do I get to torment another young goblin?” Harry grinned at Griphook who just laughed roughly and shrugged.

“I will accompany you, Harry. We will be going deep into the catacombs for several of the vaults and only your account manager

can get you there. Follow me, gentlemen.” Griphook stood and waited for the Harry and his companions by the door.

“Are you going to accompany your ward to the vaults, potions master, or do you wish to take the Rune Master to your home so that he can get started?” Ragnok asked with a toothy grin.

“I think my sanity would be best preserved by going home and letting your Rune Master get to work while these two go nosing about in dusty old tomes,” Severus replied. “I’m ready whenever your restoration crew is ready.”

August 3rd, Snape Manor

2:30 P.M.

Leading the stranger than usual looking goblin Rune Master and helpers through the floo to his living room, Severus shook his head and waited until everyone was present before leading the way downstairs.

“The room is quite large, so I have no way of knowing how long it will take for you to complete your work, Rune Master Ghakar. There are several rooms here, in the dungeons that I can easily convert for your use, or you may stay in any of the guest rooms upstairs. As for food and drink, call for Millie and she will make sure you get what you need.”

“Show us to the nearest room here in the dungeons so that I can make it to our liking, then I will be getting to work,” Ghakar replied with a very toothy smile.

Nodding with a bemused shrug, Severus led the goblins to the room across the hall and watched the Rune Master drop what looked to be small stones around the room. Once the small creature was done, he returned to the doorway and held out both hands towards the centre of the room.

“Alegakhaan ach kokaan!” he growled out and Severus felt the power that left the goblin Rune Master an instant before the stones began to

grow and take on recognizable shapes and forms. There were beds, tables, and everything else a goblin could want, or so the wizard assumed.

“You’ll let me know if you need anything else, correct?” Feeling useless at this juncture, Severus had to offer his help in some way.

“Of course, Potions Master. Ghakar will make this the greatest ritual room ever seen by human eyes...just keep that other one out of it if he’s going to be having another damn power surge. A third time might be one time too many to carve. If he’s going to do it, send him to Gringotts so we can channel the excess into our defences instead of having it go to waste charging wards on a house.”

“Um, right...well, let me open the room for you so you can get started.” Unsure whether to laugh or be offended by the goblin’s manner, Severus crossed the hall again, laid his hand in the middle of an intricate circle and muttered the trigger to open the door.

“Nerull daarelaan! You weren’t playing games when you said it had been destroyed, human! This is perfect! I can work for days off the charge that is still in the stone. Go do whatever you do, Potions Master. I will alert you when I am done.”

“Right. I’ll do that.” He had been picturing an evening of undisturbed reading in front of the fire in the library with a large glass of brandy for some time and now that the ideal moment was suddenly within his grasp, he wasn’t about to let it escape.

August 3rd, Gringotts, The Vaults

2:30 P.M.

Whooping his delight over the wild cart ride down to the Potter vault, Harry laughed and helped a slightly disoriented werewolf out once they had come to a stop.

“You okay there, Moony?”

"I think I will be once everything stops whirling around," Remus muttered and swallowed carefully before looking around to see where he was. "Is that the Potter vault?"

"Yes it is, Mr. Lupin." Griphook paused a few feet from the door and beckoned impatiently for Harry to come over and join him. "I can go no further without you, Harry."

"Oh, sorry, Griphook. What do I need to do?"

"Place your hand over the crest and say *agnosco verus hereditas per cruor*." The goblin watched closely as the Potter heir did as instructed and twitched when the door cut him to sample his blood. The rumbling sound that followed brought a huge, toothy grin to his ugly little face. "One down," he quipped.

"Ow," the teenager complained quietly before being distracted by the now open vault he stood in front of. "Hey, Remus, come take a look around. You might spot something important that wouldn't mean a damn thing to me."

"Important in what way?" Remus asked as he wandered forward to do as invited. "Emotionally, magically...you know what I mean?"

"Um, definitely emotionally important...definitely magically...see if you can find any research notes or personal journals or anything like that, okay?"

"Gotcha, Cub." Remus wandered away to see if he could find anything of importance while Harry found himself drawn to the section holding everything from dress robes to battle robes in some kind of stasis field. Looking everything over, he couldn't resist a little bit of laughter.

"What is it, Cub?"

"Oh, I just thought of a quiet way to make a very loud statement when we finally hit the political arena. Don't worry. It's all about the clothes." Dragging Remus out shortly thereafter with a shrunken trunk full of the books and other items the werewolf had chosen and a few that

Harry hadn't been able to resist, the young Lord sighed. "Which one is next and how close is it?"

"Just follow me, Harry. The Black and Evans vaults are very close by. We'll have to go even deeper into the catacombs to get to the older vaults belonging to Gryffindor, Slytherin and Myrridin and I will take you by the Riddle vault on the way back up since it is so close to the surface."

Following the goblin with mixed motions of resignation and eager anticipation, Harry spent a brief time in the main Black vault and scarcely longer in the Evans vault. He knew he would need to return and explore all of them thoroughly, but for now, he just wanted to get through them all so he could get to the wand maker and go home.

Keenly aware of his Cub's mood through his scent and his actions, Remus focused on trying to distract Harry and wasn't nearly as discombobulated by the next cart ride. Seeing the vaults of two Founders, even if it was strictly from the outside, filled him with a sense of awe that he was glad Harry seemed to share.

Stepping up to Myrridin's vault after another, shorter roller coaster ride, Harry felt a deep sense of relief and welcome wash over him as a urgent pull he only then became aware of urged him to lay his hands on the vault's simple, unadorned door.

"Ego sum prognatus draconis cruor," he whispered with no idea where the words came from. His next awareness was of being inside the vault and then the world went dark.

"Cub!" Remus tried to advance forward and was stopped by an invisible wall of force. Pacing back and forth along its edges, he occasionally looked back at the curious and slightly concerned Goblin. "Do you know if he can get out of there!"

"I have no recollections of anyone ever being brought down to this vault, Mr. Lupin, so I cannot answer that. I can only assume that if the vault wishes to let him out, it will do so. He must be proven as Myrridin's Heir if he is to openly be able to use the title and this is the only place that can happen." Griphook fidgeted under the worried

gaze of his companion and sighed. "I'm sure he will return shortly. Harry is not known for failing at important junctures. Even we Goblins are willing to admit that even though he is mostly human."

"Mostly human." Remus snorted and shook his head, only to step forward and bounce off that invisible wall with a sharp curse when he saw his Cub literally step out of the vault through the solid stone barrier. "Cub...are you okay? What happened?"

Turning a very thoughtful gaze back at the door he had just stepped through before focusing on Remus and Griphook, Harry smiled a wistful little smile and shook his head at the pacing werewolf.

"I'm okay, Moony. I can't say I was expecting to get yanked into the vault like that, but that's okay too. C'mon. It's time to get back upstairs while there's still some sunlight to enjoy. The Riddle vault won't take long and I still need to make a quick stop by Madam Malkin's before we go to Ollivander's."

"Aren't you going to tell me what happened?" Remus asked as he joined Harry and the Goblin in the cart. "You looked like something important happened in there."

"It was important but I can't tell you what it was."

"Why not!" Remus looked offended that his Cub would deny him this piece of knowledge.

"Because I can't tell you what I don't remember." Harry met Remus' gaze openly and quirked a grin at him. "I went in, I passed out or at least I think I passed out and then I was awake and knew that all I had to do to leave was to walk out."

"Oh. Can you go back in?" Remus couldn't help but be curious at this point. "Are you really Merlin's blood?"

"Oh, yeah, I have no doubt about being Merlin's heir...and I can go back later, but...something...has to happen before I can. That's all I know."

August 3rd, Madam Malkin's

4:00 P.M.

Exiting Gringotts bank with his hood up to obscure his face, Harry did something he had never done before – he straightened his back, squared his shoulders and walked down the street like everyone would expect the Lord of a pureblood family to do. Grinning to himself as his bearing and anonymity drew more attention than even the bare faced Boy Who Lived was accustomed to receiving, Harry waved Remus up to walk beside him and laughed quietly.

"I could actually get used to that now that there's more to my reputation than just surviving as a baby."

"Is that the main reason you didn't like all of the attention?"

"Oh, Merlin, no. It's how fickle the attention is. If I turned around and yelled Boo at someone right now and they screamed, then everyone around them would wonder what awful thing I'd done and probably assume I was dark. Then the attention wouldn't be so nice."

"Public opinion is a very fickle thing," the werewolf agreed and held the door to Madam Malkin's robe shop open for his Cub.

Turning to welcome her newest customers, Madam Malkin blinked in surprise at the noble bearing of the wizard who now stood looking around her shop.

"Welcome to my shop, gentlemen. How can I be of service?"

"I wish to commission several sets of robes for the Wizengamot in a more...formal style than is generally used today as well as a full wardrobe for myself. I do hope you have the old pattern books and the books containing family crests in them so I can show you what I want?" Harry shifted his hood back just enough to make eye contact with the magical seamstress. "And I am certain that your discretion is without question."

The witch's eyes widened with surprise and then recognition and she shooed her assistant out of the shop.

"Go take your lunch break, dear. I'll handle this one myself." Swallowing carefully once the girl was gone and the shop had been closed against further interruption, Madam Malkin arched an eyebrow at Harry. "How old were you looking to go on the robe designs, Lord Potter?"

"I'm honestly not sure of the time frame, but I saw several sets of robes hanging in my vault and I knew then that I had found what I was looking for." Describing the way the robes looked and how they appeared to be cut, Harry received a nod from the older woman.

"I'll start digging out the books once I have the heraldry book in front of you. Will the crest consist of only your Father's line or will there be multiple Lordships involved?"

"You can make a family crest reflect that?" Harry sounded both surprised and keenly interested in the prospect.

"Of course I can, young man. It has become a great deal more necessary in the last fifty years, what with the wars killing off so many fine people. Come on back then and you can start on the crests while I do the rest."

Walking out of the robe shop with a slightly dazed look to his eyes, Harry shook his head and groaned.

"Why do girls like to do that, Moony? I just don't understand..."

"Shopping in general is for females to enjoy and understand and for the male of the species to simply learn to endure," Remus proclaimed with a wry chuckle. "I must admit to being intrigued by exactly what you're planning for the Wizengamot, however. When you said you had found a way to quietly make a very loud statement, I didn't follow your meaning...now I am beginning to get an idea of just how devious you plan to be."

“Devious doesn’t even begin to cover it, Moony. We’ll talk more about it later, once we all have a chance to settle down, relax and just have a nice quiet discussion.”

“Yeah, I remember what it was like to have that kind of conversation...”

“Ha ha. It’s not my fault I’m more screwed up than almost anyone else I know.”

“I didn’t say it was, Cub. You wouldn’t be you if you weren’t that screwed up, though, so...we’ll talk about that later, too. Let’s go play nice with the wand maker.”

August 3rd, Snape Manor

4:00 P.M.

Raising his gaze from the most current edition of his favourite potions journal, Severus Snape picked up a snifter of brandy and gazed into the amber liquid, a slight smile curving his lips. Inhaling the warmth of the alcohol’s scent, he took a drink and savoured its rich, smooth flavour. Sighing contentedly, he relaxed further into his seat. He had been needing a break like this for weeks now.

The past ten days had been as far from idyllic as he hoped to ever see his life become and he dared to hope for a great deal more quiet time for himself as Harry’s maturity settled and he moved on to spending more time with his little friends. Short of the goblins and a few house elves, he had the place mostly to himself and he liked it that way. Life was good.

“The potions are finished and the Dark Lord will summon me when he’s ready,” he mused aloud and took another drink of his brandy. At that moment, Murphy decided it was high time to once again enact his Law on a certain potions master as a sharp intensely powerful pain startled the Death Eater turned spy. Dropping the glass from his hand, Severus clutched at his left forearm and cursed viciously even as he wondered at the sense of déjà vu he was feeling.

Still cursing in every language he could think of, he ran down to his lab to fetch two of the three potions before rushing back upstairs to grab his robes and mask. As much as he didn't want to risk apparition with the more magic sensitive of these two potions, he had no choice if the vicious way his arm was still burning and throbbing was any indicator of Voldemort's mood. Donning his robe and mask on the way to the apparition point, he composed himself and vanished with a sharp pop.

Watching the very spot where Severus should appear now that his awareness of him was restored, Voldemort snarled silently when the wayward spy appeared with a sharp pop and immediately dropped to his knees before even trying to approach the throne.

"Ah, so you can still feel my call, hmm, Severus Snape? Where have you been these last few days and why have you ignored my Call? It's not like you to deliberately anger me." Raising his wand with the pain curse already half cast, he froze at Severus' panicked reaction.

Glancing up in what he knew was likely to be interpreted as an act of defiance, the potions master took the chance at increased torture for the needed opening to plead his case. Severus' eyes went wide when he saw the Dark Lord already about to cast on him; throwing a hand out as if to ward off the spell, he shook his head vigorously.

"No, my Lord! Please! I have two of the potions...please, the Recreo would be ruined by the magic..."

Unhooking the potions satchel from his belt with shaking hands, he offered it to Voldemort and settled back into his prostrated position only once the potions were laid to rest on the throne. "I beg your forgiveness, my Lord. I have only just returned from obtaining the final ingredient for the Expurgo...I do not know why I did not feel your call until just a few moments ago but my punishment and my life is yours alone..."

"It's good to know you haven't forgotten whom it is you truly belong to," Voldemort murmured in a calm tone that belied the fury still smouldering in his crimson eyes. "Crucio."

The pain curse hit and Severus made no effort to control the contortions of his spasming body, nor the screams that the spell's power forced from his throat. He could feel the Dark Lord's rage in the sheer hell he had been dropped into and soon was hoping that death would release him from the unending agony. An eternity later the pain stopped and he lay twitching on the floor trying to settle his breathing back into any semblance of a normal pattern. An amused, snake-like face appeared in his field of vision and he tried to speak.

"Mas..." Coughing broke off his attempt to placate the monster that held him at its mercy and he cringed inside at the thought that Voldemort might not be done torturing him this time. Too much more of that level of pain would break him and he realized it with a frightening clarity that made him glad he always carried an emergency port key. If that wand came up a second time, he was going to use it and his position as a spy could be damned for all he cared.

Seeing the shuddering condition he has left his potions master in, Voldemort just watched him recover with no small amount of amusement. His temper rarely got the better of him, but for some reason his fuse was rather short today and it showed in his brutal mistreatment of the spy.

"Recover yourself, Severus. You will be staying with me to make sure the potions do their proper work. I wouldn't want to have any trouble with them and no one to punish for the failure, now would I?"

Slowly managing to get back to his original kneeling position, Severus shook his head in an attempt to clear it of the buzzing that indicated over exposure to the Cruciatus.

"As my Lord commands," he croaked out weakly.

August 3rd, Diagon Alley, Ollivander's Fine Wands

4:30 P.M.

Ollivander looked up when two cloaked and hooded individuals entered his shop. Breathing in deeply, he let the feel of their magic

wash over him and was truly surprised to barely recognize the much grown up Harry Potter.

“Hello, Mr. Lupin. Ash and hippogriff feather, eleven and three quarter inches, nicely flexible, excellent for defence and hexes.”

Turning his gaze to the tallest of the pair, he smiled slightly.

“I almost didn’t recognize you, Mr. Potter. Holly and phoenix feather, eleven inches, nice and supple, superb for defence and charms and good for transfiguration. How is it serving you?”

“My holly wand was taken from me,” Harry replied in a flat tone and pushed his hood back just enough to give him a less obstructed view of the shop. “I have another, but it started to give me trouble the week before my maturity.”

“Stuttering and growing warm?” Ollivander offered helpfully.

“More like jerking and getting hot enough to burn my hand.” The teenager sighed explosively. “I would like to make sure that it’s undamaged since it does perform well for lower powered, school level spells.”

“Ah, so you need a duelling wand, something you can pour some power into without the worry of damage to the wand itself.” Ollivander studied the young wizard intently for several minutes before arching an eyebrow. “May I see your replacement wand? I’m curious what worked for you now that you seem to have outgrown your first wand.”

Pulling the red lacquered wand out of its forearm holster, Harry laid it on the counter and watched Ollivander intently.

“Dobby found it in a bin of used wands at a junk shop in Knockturn Alley.”

“A junk shop!” Ollivander’s voice took on a horrified undertone as he examined the beautiful wand, his silvery gaze snapping up to pin Harry with a brief but intense stare. “What tragedy brought this beauty to such a lowly place...though in the end, it has found a worthy

home..." He sighed his pleasure and turned the wand over in his hands and studied the base of it before laying it back down on the counter.

"If memory serves me, which it rarely fails to do, then this is an Imperial wand," Ollivander explained. "Given the quality and the fact that the core is an Imperial Dragon heartstring, I feel safe in guessing that it may have belonged to one of the Emperor's during the Ming Dynasty."

Remus coughed sharply at that, his amber gaze darting from Harry to Ollivander and back. Regaining control of him self, the werewolf laughed briefly.

"Only you, Cub. Only you or your house elf could find a Ming Dynasty heirloom in a junk bin..."

Familiar with only the most basic concept of how valuable the wand was given the term 'Ming', Harry looked at the beautiful, but for the most part unassuming wand and frowned.

"It seems fairly simple for an Emperor..."

"They weren't all into flashy displays, Mr. Potter. The maker's mark on the end of the wand, coupled with the artistry of the Phoenix and Imperial Dragon inlay and the sheer quality, I would say this is a masterwork wand from the hand of Master Wandmaker, Jiang-su Ch'ang. He did the majority of his work during the early fourteen hundreds."

"So this wand is almost six hundred years old?" Harry sounded like he almost wanted to be ill. "And I almost ruined it?"

"I'd say between five hundred and five hundred and fifty years and you came no where close to ruining it, Mr. Potter, of that I am certain. This wand is a heavily lacquered shaft of Cypress wood with an Imperial Dragon heartstring core, as I have already mentioned. Cypress is an interesting wood to work with, to say the very least." Ollivander sighed. "So, at what point does it start to stutter? Would

you mind casting a few spells for me in the practice range so I can get a feel for how much power we are going to be accommodating?"

"That sounds like a good idea." Harry slipped the wand into its wrist sheath and nodded. "Are you sure it won't damage the wand?"

"I won't let you take it far enough to do harm to the wand, Mr. Potter. On that, you have my wizard's oath."

Satisfied with the resulting glow of magic that sealed the older man's promise, Harry nodded again and watched Ollivander close up the shop with a graceful gesture.

"Having fun yet, Moony?"

"This is fascinating, Cub. Absolutely fascinating. You just do what you need to do and I'll amuse myself by watching you two figure out how to fit you to a new wand." The werewolf grinned toothily and found himself a place to sit that was out of their way, but one that still offered an unobstructed view of the goings on in the room.

"What do you want me to cast?" Harry twirled his wand between his fingers for a moment before settling into a relaxed duelling stance.

"Just go for something simple like reducto. The walls are warded and enchanted to become stronger the more magic is pumped into them, so don't feel a need to hold back in that regard. If the wand grows warm or stutters in the slightest, stop casting."

"I can do that," Harry murmured and aimed down the room. "Reducto," he murmured and cast a low powered blasting curse. Frowning, he cast again and shook his head. "Those aren't supposed to be that bright. Every thing I cast with this wand seems to come out more powerful than I planned anyway, so maybe that's what it is..."

Filing that bit of information away for future reference, Ollivander smiled encouragingly.

"A truly well matched wand will do that. Unfortunately this wand cannot handle your full capability, but go ahead and push a little. Let me get a feel for your magic."

"Okay...how about a Patronus? That was one I could do with my old wand, so it might still work with this one."

"That's reasonable. Go ahead and try."

Considering which memory to use, Harry smiled contentedly and raised his wand. He immediately dropped the wand and hissed angrily while shaking his burned hand. He froze when Ollivander caught his hand between both of his own and whispered something under his breath. The pain was gone as fast as it began and he studied the older man with a quizzical expression on his face. He had almost understood what Ollivander had said, but it eluded his comprehension.

"Okay, that was a bad idea..." Harry shook his head and sighed explosively.

"Try it wandlessly, Cub. We didn't try the Patronus because it's such a power intensive spell." Remus nodded encouragingly and gestured for Harry to try again. "You know what you can and can't do, Harry. Can you cast it wandlessly?"

Nodding that yes, he could do it, the green-eyed teen relaxed again, smiled and cast with a sharp outward thrust of his hand. Light burst from his hand and Prongs formed up into stark detail. Trotting around the room as if seeking anything that might be a danger to his Summoner, the large stag finally trotted over to Harry with a disappointed sounding snort. Brushing past Ollivander, Prongs nuzzled Harry's hand and faded away into nothingness.

"I could feel him nuzzling my hand," Harry whispered. "I could feel his fur...hear his hooves on the floor..."

"Indeed," Ollivander breathed. "I did not know a corporeal Patronus could push someone out of the way..."

"They generally can't," Remus commented. "That was beautiful, Cub. What memory did you choose?"

"The day I discovered I still had a family," Harry whispered and smiled a little mistily at the werewolf. "The day I found a place to call home."

"Cub...I'm glad you're finally happy." Remus took a deep breath and slowly let it out, his own eyes bright with unshed tears that he swiped at with a rough chuckle. "Come to think of it, that day would probably be the one I'd choose, too."

"Cool." Harry looked to the wand maker and grinned a little. "Is that what you needed?"

"That was exactly what I needed you to do. Merlin's beard, but you always were the complicated one. I don't think a wooden shaft is going to work for your wand, but I need you to try one or two before we start work on a custom wand."

"Custom? You mean we may be making a wand today?" Harry fairly bounced with excited curiosity. "That would be so brilliant! I've always wondered how you make them."

"I'll second that exclamation," Remus teased gently.

"The most difficult part is matching up the core with the right shaft material, especially so when dealing with a custom wand. I have very few Master Work wands in my general selection since so few ever have the power to require one. I'll be back shortly."

Watching Ollivander wander back towards the front of the shop, Harry turned to arch an eyebrow at Remus, eyes sparkling with good humour while he twirled his wand through his fingers.

"I can't wait to see what we come up with."

"Neither can I, Cub. I wonder what you'll have for a core?"

"Probably not Phoenix this time, but whatever else...who knows." Turning to nod at Ollivander, Harry accepted the first wand and

sighed. "How about I just pull up the magic to cast a Patronus and see if it does what my other wand did."

"Go right ahead, Mr. Potter." Ollivander felt a burst of pre-mature triumph just before Harry abruptly eased his grip and stopped pulling on his magic. "No luck?"

"No, I'm afraid not," Harry muttered unhappily. "I think I scorched it a little, but nothing beyond that."

"That rules out wood of any kind, then. If ironwood is insufficient, then no wood is likely to work. Try this one." He handed Harry a wand that had a graceful twist to it. He smiled at the boy's fascination. "That is a Narwhal horn, not unicorn, though the two are very similar."

Remus watched Harry pull on his magic and pause to glare at the wand like it had done something offensive. Harry shook the horn and hissed at it in what sounded like a very uncomplimentary way before handing it back to Ollivander. Sniggering, the werewolf shook his head.

"What was that all about?"

"It bloody well refused to work!" Not seeing it as being funny, Harry glared at the wand again before relenting to the humorous aspect of his actions.

"So it did nothing? You felt no compatibility with it?" Ollivander sounded a bit disappointed.

"It wasn't that. I could feel my magic respond to it. The wand refused to work for me when I tried to push magic through it." Harry growled before subsiding completely. "Next?" he asked with a wry laugh.

"Next we figure out what to use as the shaft of the new wand. Is there anything you feel a particular affinity towards?" Ollivander arched an eyebrow when Harry's face took on a particularly thoughtful expression. Then the teen was pulling a foot and a half long shaft of some white bone like material that he didn't recognize as a fang until

it was laying on his worktable. His hand hovered over it and his silvery eyes went wide.

“A very old basilisk...I feel phoenix here, in the clean area. Would you know anything about that?”

“Fawkes...so that’s how it got into my room,” Harry mused. “It was on my bed when I came out of the bathroom this morning and I thought that Dobby had brought to me from the Chamber.” He sobered. “She was an old one...a thousand years old, at least, from what Tom intimated. It hurt me to have to kill her, but she was mad, a danger...she nearly did kill me too. Fawkes is the only reason I survived that night.”

“Why is that?” Ollivander leaned forward, gaze intensely curious.

“The basilisk’s fang pierced my bicep when I ran the Sword of Gryffindor through the top of its mouth. I would have died from the poison if Fawkes hadn’t cried in the wound.”

Contemplating the fang, then Harry, the old wand maker nodded to himself before frowning a little.

“Very few cores will be compatible with this fang due to the reactivity of the venom. I will collect those that I have and see which one you react most favourably to.”

“Would it help if you had something to act as a balance? I have basilisk venom and phoenix tears in my blood and it’s the same venom as the basilisk that lost this fang.”

“How do you manage it?” Ollivander whispered almost soundlessly and sighed when Remus just shrugged and grinned at him while Harry managed to look innocent. “Yes, that might very well be the deciding factor once a core has been selected. Now, tell me what inspires in you the greatest emotions. That will help guide me to a group of possible cores. From there, you will know it when you feel it near you.”

“Okay...” Eyes drifting closed, Harry frowned a little, then smiled. “Flying...there’s no other feeling in the world that can compare with climbing to a thousand feet and dropping like a stone...only to pull up and swoop away at the last second...” Voice full of eager excitement, his smile grew to a bright and joyful expression.

Ollivander threw a wistful look in Remus’ direction and shrugged when the werewolf eyed him curiously.

“I, too, love to fly, but I rarely get to do so anymore.”

“I’m sorry,” Harry whispered almost mournfully. “It almost killed me to not be able to fly last year.” He sighed and shook himself. “Strong emotions...betrayal, being lied to,” he growled, eyes flashing with a burning hate that he quickly swallowed away, lest it get out of hand. “Friends and family...Remus and Severus...the Weasleys, ‘Mione, Luna, Neville...”

“The freedom of flight, hatred and a desire for vengeance on the betrayer and love and loyalty to family; those are all very helpful and motivationally powerful emotions,” Ollivander murmured. “Given your affinity with serpents, that gives me a few ideas I might never have considered before.” He went to a large wardrobe and spoke so quietly they could barely hear what he said before the soft click of an opening lock was heard.

“What language is that?” Harry gave the wand maker a look crossed between confusion and intense concentration. “I can almost understand it...it feels like I should, but I can’t...”

Visibly surprised, Ollivander met Harry’s gaze and seemed to search for something before nodding slightly. Just one more piece of information to file away, he mused to himself and smiled a little.

“If it is a language you are meant to know, it will come to you in time. If not, then nothing I can do will ever make its meaning clear. I would tell you more if I could.”

Returning that searching gaze, satisfied with the regret he saw in the man’s silver eyes, Harry nodded reluctantly.

"You would tell me if you could...alright, I guess I'll have to wait and see on something else. What cores do I need to look at?"

"Give me a moment and I will lay them out on the work table. Kindly turn your back, as I do not want anything to interfere in your choice," Ollivander instructed. "Keep your eyes closed and I will have Remus lead you over when I am ready for you to choose a core." Pulling close to a dozen vials out of the heavily warded cupboard, the wand maker was unprepared for the young wizard's immediate reaction.

"Oh...what is that?" Eyes still closed, Harry turned to Ollivander and reached out instinctively to that which called to his magic. "It feels like flying..."

"How does the basilisk fang 'feel' to you, Harry?" Remus quirked a grin at the older wizard. "If something over there feels like flying, how does the fang feel?"

"Vengeance and pain," Harry whispered in a harsh tone, face hardening for but a moment before that other feeling pulled at him again. "It must be a feather or a part of something that flies...it has to be to feel like this..."

"That narrows things down quite a bit," Ollivander commented wryly and put away the vials that did not contain feathers or parts of other flying creatures. Left with only three vials, he looked down at them and focused on a foot long, shimmering black feather. Putting the other two items away, he closed the cupboard and slowly crossed the room towards the almost vibrating teenager. Placing the vial in Harry's hand, he took a step back and watched the relief flow over him as his body visibly relaxed.

/Oh...yessssss/ Harry hissed out in Parseltongue and held the vial like it was more precious to him than anything else he had ever before encountered. /Perfect./

"What in the world is that?" Remus whispered, amber eyes a bit wide as he watched Harry commune with a clearly very magical feather.

“That is perhaps the rarest core material in my possession,” Ollivander replied just as quietly. “It is the feather of a nearly extinct South American winged serpent named the Kukulkan for the High Dragon it resembles. They are very magical, wickedly intelligent, deadly poisonous and a beautiful sight to see. I am not surprised by his choice now that I think about it.”

Blinking his eyes open, Harry gasped sharply and stared at the shimmering black feather. Turning it this way and that, he smiled at the fiery flashes of colour that appeared when the light hit it.

“This is beautiful, Mr. Ollivander...you called it a Kukulkan? Was there really a High Dragon that looked like it?”

“There was a very, very long time ago, Mr. Potter. They have been gone from our world for several thousand years now. All that remains as a reminder is the small Kukulkan serpent.”

“Will this work with the fang?”

“Given the similar natures of both serpents, I believe so, but I would prefer to use your blood as a binder just in case there is a negative reaction. I only need a small vial full.” Conjuring the aforementioned vial, Ollivander pressed it to Harry’s offered arm and muttered a short spell under his breath; removing the vial that was now full of dark red blood and a swirling silvery luminescence, he took a step back to admire the contents much like Harry had done with the feather. “My word, you were quite serious about the unusual properties of your blood, young man. Well, let’s get your wand made, shall we? The difficult part is over – all you have to do now is watch.”

“Okay...” Reluctantly handing over the vial containing the feather, Harry conjured a seat next to the work bench and made himself comfortable. “C’mon. Moony. This is going to be cool.”

Shaking his head, the wand maker tuned his companions out and focused on the large fang that lay in front of him. As an after thought, he pulled out his tape measure and gestured for Harry to stand.

"I can't very well go by your old measurements, now can I?" The tape measure snaked out to measure the length of Harry's arms and a few other seemingly meaningless measurements before coiling up in Ollivander's hand, who then returned it to his pocket. "Excellent. Now I can begin."

Remus sat forward beside his cub and watched with open fascination as power rolled out from the older wizard's hands and shaped the fang into a decoratively designed grip and smooth shafted wand that gleamed dangerously in the candle light.

Nodding his satisfaction with the length of the actual wand and the shape of the grip after a final inspection of Harry's wand hand, Ollivander poured the vial of blood over the smooth ivory and used his magic to force it into the hollow space inside. The nature of the material had saved him a great deal of work since the fang had been hollow like a hypodermic needle to begin with. Pulling the Kukulcan feather from its vial with careful reverence, he laid it on the haft of the wand and had barely begun to 'push' with his own power before it vanished into the core with a visible shimmer of discharged magic.

"How curious," Ollivander mused and looked up at Harry. "But then, I tend to say things like that around you quite frequently, so why should now be any different, hmm? Basilisk fang and Kukulcan feather, fourteen and a half inches. This will be a superb wand for the Dark Arts, curses and hexes. Take up your wand, young man and go to the practice area before you so much as give it a wave. I dare say sparks are the very least of my expectations with this Master Work."

"You never did touch it," Remus observed. "Why?"

"That fang is still deadly poisonous, Mr. Lupin, even when the contact is brief. You might survive a little longer than average after touching it, but I doubt you would make it to St. Mungo's in time to be given the Basilisk anti-venom."

"But that fang is from a basilisk that is four years dead," Remus protested.

“Basilisk’s are magical creatures, lesser Dragons no less and they do not decay like natural things. A century from now, that fang could still kill with its venom and now young Mr. Potter’s magic will sustain it indefinitely, so spells are not the only defence Mr. Potter will have while he carries this wand.”

“And basilisk venom is as much a contact poison as an injected one...bloody hell...Harry, talk to Severus when we get home. We’re going to have to start carrying basilisk anti-venom in case one of us has to touch your wand or if someone does accidentally...”

“It’s really that serious?” Harry paled and sank back down into his seat; the implications were a bit scary, but also incredibly reassuring. “How can I keep people from touching it other than warning them verbally?”

“With your permission, Mr. Potter, I would like to cast a few enchantments on your wand to guard against such accidental encounters. A repelling charm similar to the one many use against muggles as well as a rather sharp stinging hex should do the trick. If they get past that, and they are not one of your trusted friends, then perhaps they deserve what happens to them.” Ollivander’s smile was a frightening match for the malicious one that graced Harry’s lips ever so briefly. “Now, about your Ming wand...”

“What about it?” Harry sounded nervous.

“I will have to register it with the Ministry, but I will wait until midnight of September first to do so. That way you will have an official wand that you can show off, while keeping the fang hidden.” Ollivander sighed and scrawled out the incantation for the Ministry tracking charm. “I can give you a few temporary forearm holsters for it, but your wand will require something more...durable like basilisk hide for a permanent holster. These should last you several months, but if you notice any discolouration or damage, destroy the holster immediately and use a new one.”

Seeing the sober understanding in Harry’s gaze, Ollivander continued. “This is the incantation for the Ministry tracking charm. You must

place it on the wand the night before you return to Hogwarts. Do you understand?"

"Right...cast this on the Ming wand the night before I go to school. Gotcha. Can I go test my wand now? All of this talk won't amount to much if it doesn't work."

"Of course. Just keep it simple until you get a feel for how the wand is going to react with your magic," Ollivander cautioned the impatient young man.

Grinning, Harry picked up the wand and froze in place, back arching slightly as his magic surged in reaction to his contact with the wand. Shuddering, he let out a shaky breath and shook himself vigorously.

"That was...wild...I'll definitely have to be careful," Harry stated and strode over to the practice area, the young wizard's aura rising around him like heat shimmer as he raised his wand to cast the first spell.

"Sweet Merlin," Remus whispered, amber gaze fixated by that hypnotic effect as a vibrantly red spell shot out from the wand and impacted on the back wall with the resounding rumble of a small, but powerfully explosive detonation. "Was that a Reducto?"

"Yeah. That was wicked, wasn't it!"

"I've created a monster," Ollivander bemoaned with a grin on his face. "Try pushing your magic through the wand, Mr. Potter. I would prefer to know that it isn't going to fail you if you really get going."

"I can do that," Harry agreed gleefully and faced down the practice range yet again.

Remus froze when a bright green spell was sent down the range, his face going pale and shocked. Then Harry laughed his delight and said the spell he'd used loudly enough for him to clearly hear it.

"Tersus Scaphium!" Harry cried out and let out another round of genuine laughter as his pot cleaning spell rocketed down the range

like a basketball size sphere of green fire instead of the golf ball size orb that was normally created by the commonly used household spell.

“The pot cleaning spell, Cub? What the bloody hell are you trying to do to me!” Remus barked and couldn’t help him self. He started chuckling as relief flooded his thoughts.

“Well, I was looking through this book on household spells and discovered that the pot cleaning spell was pretty close to the same colour as the Avada Kedavra and I don’t know anyone who isn’t going to dodge or duck or something like that when they see a green spell coming at them. I figure it will work great as a distraction tactic until I actually hit someone with it.” Harry shrugged. “I don’t know what it will do if that happens...”

Ollivander arched an eyebrow at the teenager and started to smile. The pure ingenuity of the thought made the older wizard very happy to know some of the younger generation.

“Cast it again and really try to take the paint off the walls with it,” he urged with a delighted burst of laughter.

August 3rd, Unplottable Location

4:30 P.M.

Handing the first draught to the Dark Lord, a vial of De-Aging Potion, Severus watched him drink it down and cast Tempus to monitor the timing.

“You should start to feel some restoration from this alone, my Lord.” Observing the evil man with keen eyes, Severus noted the smoothing of Voldemort’s skin and other clear signs of a more youthful form.

Conjuring a full length mirror with a casual gesture of his hand, Voldemort studied his reflection and could, indeed, see the very signs of improvement that Severus had already noted privately.

“How long before I can take the Recreo Primaevus?”

“The De-Aging potion requires at least an hour to complete its work, My Lord. In this case, mixing the two prior to that time could be entirely counter-productive.”

Nodding his understanding, Voldemort sighed almost silently. He had known that, but couldn't help testing in seemingly subtle ways to find out if Severus was finally going to try and betray him overtly. So far the wily spy had chosen to play his role to the tee and the Dark Lord wasn't about to complain when the result was to his own personal benefit.

“Very well. Tell me what you know of the Potter brat's disappearance.”

“Disappearance, my Lord?” Severus frowned and shook his head. “The last I heard at an Order meeting nearly a fortnight ago, the boy was still living in the lap of luxury with those muggle relatives of his. I have not spoken to Albus or any of the rest since then.”

“The boy vanished right along with his pet werewolf almost immediately after that meeting,” Voldemort commented. “They have, apparently, been travelling. The little monster sent me a hat with mouse ears on it from a place called Disney,” he concluded contemptuously.

Familiar with only the vaguest references to Euro Disney, Severus shook his head and shrugged a little.

“I am barely familiar with the name of the muggle amusement park called Euro Disney, my Lord. Perhaps this is the place he is visiting?” The Slytherin Head of House was now immensely grateful to have avoided having anything to do with the plotting and pranking that had been going on between Remus and Harry. Enduring a nearly unending interrogation from Voldemort for the entirety of the hour before he could administer the Recreo Primaevus Draught, Severus was about to the point where he hoped the potion would render the mad man unconscious so he could kick him a few times while he was down. He'd already thought about actually Avada Kedavraing him, but that might actually hurt Harry, so trying to kill the Dark Lord would have to wait...

“Ah, here you are, my lord. You might want to sit, as I do not know what effect the potion will have immediately.”

More than happy to oblige the potions master by returning to his place on his throne, Voldemort sat back and drank the swirling gold and white potion. Shuddering visibly, he dropped the now empty vial and fought to remain upright in his seat as agony unlike anything he'd ever felt except being ripped from his body by a certain rebounded curse tore through his nerves and muscles before seeming to sink deeper into his very essence.

Observing the Dark Lord as he fought through the painful effects of this last potion, Severus fought the urge to do a happy dance. Here he was, getting to watch the damnable man suffer willingly through pain that he had caused the Dark Lord to feel and he couldn't run through the complex gloating about it. Swallowing his disappointed glee, he focused on the task at hand and had to admit to a certain amount of pride in his handiwork.

“The changes are already quite visible, my Lord. It won't be long before you will be unrecognizable to anyone except those who knew you when you were younger.”

Standing through sheer force of will, Voldemort returned to his place before his conjured mirror and blinked in silent surprise. The potions master hadn't been exaggerating his statement. Smiling his approval, he stood resolutely through the agony of his transformation so he could see every nuance of the change.

Feeling a bit daunted by the time the potion had worked its way completely through Voldemort's system, Severus made mental note to never again underestimate the sheer willpower that had driven this man to exist as a spectre for years until he could have a new body fashioned for him.

“It will be another hour or so before the potion has run its course, my Lord. After that, you may still see some minor changes depending on how well it is interacting with your magic. Forgive me that I do not know how long those changes may continue to occur.”

“Very well,” the Dark Lord murmured and shook his head just to feel the weight of his hair move with every sharp action. He continued his personal vigil and relaxed as the pain finally eased and came to an end almost exactly an hour later. Beckoning Severus over, he bared the man’s Mark and pressed his finger to it to activate the summoning. Releasing the staggered spy without any sign of acknowledgement for the pain he had caused him, Voldemort cast a quick Glamourie charm and checked it in the mirror while he waited for those he had summoned to arrive.

Apparating into the audience chamber at her master’s home, Bellatrix knelt at Voldemort’s side and kissed the hem of his robe adoringly.

“What would you have of me, my Lord?”

“Take these others and attack Diagon Alley. Leave everything in ruins and make sure there is no doubt that Lord Voldemort can strike anywhere, anytime he pleases. Do what you do best, my darling Bella.”

Torn inside because he couldn’t warn Harry and Remus – or anyone else for that matter – Severus resigned himself to his task of keeping an eye on the Dark Lord as the potions continued to do their work of restoring his appearance to that of a more human seeming.

August 3rd, Diagon Alley

6:30 P.M.

“Make sure you break it in well, Mr. Potter. Your power and the wand must become well acquainted or it could prove to be a bit temperamental at times,” Ollivander reminded the currently smiling teen. “I’m not sure what spells you’d use to push your limits with it, but I wouldn’t be surprised if your mentors can’t come up with a few suggestions.”

“I’ll remember, Mr. Ollivander. Thank you for making the wand...it fits perfectly with my magic.” Feeling a great deal more secure with his

new wand comfortably settled into its forearm holster, Harry adjusted his hood and stepped out of Ollivander's wand shop.

"Severus and I will keep him in line," Remus commented with a wry chuckle. "Thank you for a very fascinating day, Mr. Ollivander."

Turning to look up Diagon Alley towards Gringotts, Harry's good mood was shattered by the sharp sounds of multiple apparitions coming straight into the shopping crowds. Straightening abruptly, Harry's aura appeared around him in its typical nearly invisible shimmer and he started to bark out orders to Remus.

"Death Eaters! Get as many people under cover as you can without getting yourself killed, Moony. I've got this."

"Cub, damn it!" Obeying his Cub's orders despite the warring desire to just get Harry to safety, Remus hurried as many people as possible back into the warded store fronts and into alleys where they could find cover before ricocheting spell fire forced him back under cover with Ollivander of all people. Frowning at the calm and vaguely amused older wizard, Remus shook his head and started firing off spells at the unprotected backs of the Death Eaters he could see.

Looking for signs of any Inner Circle Death Eaters as the witches and wizards that filled the alley recognized the only too familiar black cloaks and white masks of Death Eaters, Harry growled his frustration. Screaming and crying rose above the other panicked sounds as everyone scrambled to get under cover. The angry resentment he had been swallowing down since he first saw his genealogical parchment flared into full flame and found a focus when his eyes lighted on the unmasked face of Bellatrix Lestrange.

Shifting into a looser, more open duelling stance, he growled under his breath and glanced over at the still scrambling werewolf.

"Get those bystanders under cover, now, damn it!" Satisfied that Remus was carrying out his order, Harry turned back and located Bella amidst the dozen or so Death Eaters that surrounded her. He smirked and it was not a pleasant expression.

“Reducto! Bella! Oh Bella!” He called out to her in a mocking, sing-song tone and advanced on the mad woman. His spells bounced off her shield spell but still managed to push her back a bit and the sight of her bracing herself inspired him even more.

“Wh-Protego!” Defending herself against attack before she was consciously aware of its source, Bellatrix gestured sharply for the other Death Eaters to continue with their objective – mass, wanton destruction. More than happy to deal with such an arrogant upstart, she was still surprised to feel her shield spell ripple under the force of his blasting hex. Digging her heels in, she managed to keep from sliding more than an inch or two; rallying with an attack of her own, she advanced on her opponent while wandlessly maintaining her shields at full strength.

“Avada Kedavra! Crucio! Sectumsempra!”

Sidestepping out of the way of spells he couldn’t block with serpentine grace, and wandlessly knocking away those that he could shield against, Harry grinned maniacally under his hood.

“Reducto! Sectumsempra! Expelliarmus!”

Letting her shields deflect the first few school level spells until she got a true feel for their power, Bella let loose with a contemptuous laugh and continued to taunt him between spells. “Is that all you’ve got! A bunch of school boy spells? Why don’t you start throwing something real!” Laughing amidst her sneering commentary, Bellatrix practically danced out of the way of his next set of spells to avoid having to brace against the pure force that was behind them.

“Avada Kedavra! Praemium Somes! Agon Verbero! Animus Intorqueo!” Rattling off a list of bone breaking, agony inducing spells, Bellatrix ground her teeth in frustration when all the upstart did was dodge or counter irregardless of how dark the spell was. “Vomica Cruor!”

Uncertain where his new found knowledge was coming from and not particularly concerned since it was keeping him alive and unharmed, Harry avoided the majority of her spells and yelped out his pain when

the bone breaking hex grazed his left arm and shattered his humerus. Vision flaring to red as the rage and pain consumed him and kept him on his feet, he assessed his surroundings and renewed his own attack to give himself time to heal his arm while the enemy was recovering from their own wounds.

Remus watched from the side lines once all of the remaining Death Eaters had ducked under cover or had ceased moving due to one rebounding spell or another. Hearing his Cub scream in pain jerked him into motion towards the viciously duelling pair and he growled threateningly when a surprisingly strong grip stopped him from leaving the wards.

"No, Mr. Lupin...this is not a fight you can help him with. Besides, he has already healed his hurts," Ollivander commented quietly, tone full of wonder and appreciation. "To leave the wards is death. Ah, there's his proper aura...I wondered where it was hiding."

"I have to help him," Remus whispered and shook off the older wizard's grip. "He shouldn't have to do this alone..."

"He chose this. Let him finish it." Ollivander smirked at the werewolf. "Or am I going to have to stun you to keep you from doing something stupid that will get you killed against his wishes?"

"Damn you..." Spells ricocheted around at an even more alarming rate and Remus was suddenly very glad to be where he was as his view of Harry showed him a display of raw power and spell knowledge that left him terrified and awed at the same time. He made mental note to discuss this once they got home...if they got home...

"This real enough for you, Bella? Agon Verbero! Animus Intorqueo! Dokaach rharec!" Harry snarled out and turned his wand on his own arm. "Resarcio Vulnus!" he hissed out and let out another distinctly audible cry of pain as his arm healed before straightening and looking about to see what damage he had done to the enemy.

Delighted to have even a minor challenge, Bellatrix gleefully avoided her opponent's increasingly darker, deadlier spells. Laughing at his pained outcry and filled with the certainty of victory, she was

completely unprepared for the unknown blasting curse that hit the cobblestones a few feet in front of her. Thrown backwards and up into the air, she finally hit the street and skidded to a halt a full storefront away from where she had begun. Coughing as dust and debris pelted her even as she assessed her own condition and found herself to be relatively uninjured, the mad woman shook herself and took in her surroundings. The cries of pain and screams of fear nearby told her not all of her men had been so lucky. What the bloody hell was that?

Oblivious to the carnage around them, gaze focused entirely on this suddenly, surprisingly dangerous young man, Bellatrix's eyes widened as she picked herself up off of the street. Only one person alive – to her knowledge – had eyes that particular shade of green. Her grin grew to even greater maniacal proportions as she moved in with a tactic that would only work if she was correct about whom she was facing.

"Does ickle harry potty miss his dogfather, hmm?" she baby talked in a high voice. "Oooh, has ickle potty stooped to doing bad magic? His dogfather Sirius would be soooooo sad....pity we aren't down there...I could send you straight to him..."

"Why'd you do it, Bella?" Harry growled. "He was your blood kin!"

"A blood traitor, you mean," Bellatrix snarled back in reply. "He got in my way, ickle harry potty! He was weak and betrayed his blood, so I put him down like the dog he was! He deserved worse than he got! Avada Kedavra!"

Taken beyond reason as rage filled him up like a cup and overflowed into his aura, something broke open inside Harry and he snarled at the woman in front of him, his eyes flaring to a true Avada Kedavra green. Avoiding her unforgivable curse, he let all of his newly discovered spell knowledge come to the fore front of his mind and hit her with everything he could think of.

"Praemium Somes! Agon Verbero! Animus Intorqueo! Vomica Cruror! Sectumsempra!" Revelling in her screams when the agony spell struck her exposed back and in the spray of blood caused by his

cutting curse, Harry stalked forward with every intention of pressing his advantage.

Shielding fiercely, returning fire as best she could, Bellatrix found herself feeling not quite so confident all of a sudden. Facing off against Harry Potter was certainly not an event she would have expected to make her weak in the knees and her mind kept insisting that this couldn't possibly be the same boy. This man fought like the Dark Lord – dark, dirty and driven.

“Avada Kedavra! Crucio! Avada Kedavra!” she fired off in rapid succession in the hopes of breaking his immediate concentration. He side stepped the first AK, but the Crucio hit and he went to one knee, thus avoiding the second AK. To her horror, he shrugged off the Crucio and returned to his feet through the pain and bore down on her again with renewed determination.

Pain tore through the red rage that was Harry's only haven, and he screamed for but a moment before fighting through it. This pain was nothing to Tom's pain curses and he forced himself to his feet.

Harry raised his basilisk fang wand and aimed it directly at Bellatrix. He hissed a spell she couldn't have understood even had she heard it and sickly yellowish-green energy coalesced around his hand and the wand it held before shooting out towards his intended victim. He knew she recognized it because she broke her own attack and dove out of the way of his incoming spell. The terror on her face made him feel even more powerful and he advanced on his fallen prey, his own face devoid of any emotion bystanders might have recognized.

Recognizing the mass of sickly greenish-yellow light that was barrelling down at her for the slow, agonizing doom that it was, Bellatrix threw herself to the side and shuddered in relief when it missed her.

She had seen the effects of this spell when used by the Dark Lord. It took hours and hours of irreversible agony for the victim of this curse to die and she didn't plan to meet her end in that particular way if she could help it. The shrieks of a fellow Death Eater told her Harry hadn't missed entirely.

Turning, she risked a glance up as she closed her hand on her emergency port key. She met his gaze as he stalked towards her and the look in his Avada Kedavra eyes held the promise of terrible pain before he would even consider allowing her to die. Pale and shaken, she was never more grateful for the gut wrenching pull of dislocated space as she was whisked away by her port key.

Remus cautiously approached the pacing form of his cub with no small amount of trepidation. The werewolf kept his hands visible and his voice as steady as possible – he had to get him calmed down so he could get him home before the Aurors showed up.

“Cub...Harry...try to listen to my voice...” The distant sound of apparition reached his ears and he groaned audibly before placing himself between the angrily pacing form of his godson and the direction the Aurors would be advancing from.

“The crazy bitch ran away! How dare she run away from me! I wasn’t done with her,” Harry growled out, green eyes flashing. “It’s time to go.” Pulling Remus against him, he tandem apparated them back to Snape Manor; releasing his friend, he stormed towards the house in a roil of angry power.

August 3rd, Unplottable Location

6: 38 P.M.

Studying his new self in the mirror, Voldemort smiled his pleasure and then suddenly snarled at the offending object and lashed out with his fist. The glass shattered and he turned his snarling attention to his bloodied knuckles. Seeing his own blood, an uncommon occurrence in and of itself, jerked his attention around to exactly what he was doing and feeling. More appropriately, it made him aware that the rage could not possibly be his own since he had been in a perfectly amiable mood just moments ago. He had been a bit testy all day, but nothing that would explain this sudden mood swing.

No, this raging firestorm of hate and anger that felt so like his own moods when he would kill anything in sight for the pure pleasure of it

was not his emotion – it belonged to his little Serpent and he was more than a little intrigued. Just when he dared to think that the boy had become predictable, he would do something like this and make things even more interesting than they had been at any other time before.

“What have you done, my little Serpent?” he whispered. “Who has caused you to feel this rage?” On the heels of his verbal musings came a partial answer as loud and clear as if Harry had been standing at his side. The crazy bitch ran away! How dare she run away from me! I wasn’t done with her! Send her back now!

Stunned by the mercurial shifts in Voldemort’s moods and recognizing them as being eerily similar to the way Harry’s moods tended to shift, Severus came to the abrupt and unpleasant realization that the bond between the two wizards really wasn’t one way and that the teen could just as easily incapacitate the older wizard with unexpected bursts of powerful emotion as Voldemort had been known to do to Harry.

“Are...you well, my Lord?” he ventured cautiously.

“I am quite well, Severus. My...the Potter boy is a thing of rage, however...this doesn’t bode well for whomever has pushed him to this level.”

Deciding that now is as good a time as any to let Severus go, Voldemort opened his mouth to send him away when first Bellatrix, then the rest of the raiding party reappeared in the audience chamber via their emergency port keys. Recasting a Parseltongue Glamourie charm over his currently much improved appearance, the Dark Lord snarled silently and let his anger focus on its newest target – his Serpent’s target - Bellatrix and her obviously failed mission.

Severus took one look at Bellatrix lying huddled and shaking on the floor and can’t resist the urge to make a snarky comment.

“If that isn’t the best position I’ve ever seen you in, Bella, then I can’t think of one that might suit you more,” he drawled meanly and then

realized he had spoken aloud. Glancing cautiously over at the Dark Lord, he scrambled to avoid being punished further.

“Forgive me, my Lord...I spoke out of turn...”

“Oh, no, you spoke it quite appropriately, Severus...that does seem to be a common position for my dear Bellatrix these days,” Voldemort sneered and shook his head, disappointment openly obvious alongside the burgeoning rage. This was the second time his little Serpent had put Bellatrix in a similar position and he was torn between being proud of Harry and disappointed in Bellatrix. “You may go, Severus. Finish the last potion as quickly as you can without ruining it. I will summon you in seven days. Do not miss my Call again.”

“Yes, my Lord.” Severus bowed his head and apparated away before the Dark Lord could change his mind.

August 3rd, Snape Manor

6:40 P.M.

Harry stalked up to the house ahead of Remus and slammed the door open with a wandless, wordless Alhomora. Still in a towering rage, he bee-lined for the training room and proceeded to repeatedly test the strength of the warding with over powered blasting curses and many of the other, darker spells that were now bubbling around in his mind.

Staggering into the house, all pretence of recovery gone now that he is no longer in the Dark Lord’s presence, Severus called out to his house elf and was startled to see Remus come rushing up to help him into the sitting room.

“Oh, my poor Master...” Millie wrung her hands briefly before recovering her composure. “What potions is Master needing?”

“Cruciatus relief, non-drowsy pain potion and an extra strength healing potion,” Severus managed before sinking into the chair that Remus had guided him to. Shuddering as he bit back a whimper, the

potions master blinked at the pacing werewolf. "What the bloody hell happened at the Alley? Bella said Harry..."

"Just relax and get those potions into your system and I'll tell you about it," Remus murmured, amber eyes filled with concern. "Was he really that angry with you? I didn't think he tended to hit you this hard, especially when you have something he's been wanting..."

"Wards kept me from feeling his Call for a few days," Severus whispered and accepted the potions vials from Millie. Downing the Cruciatus relief, he sank further into the soft chair and sighed as the muscle tremors finally began to ease off. "He was so enraged," he murmured. "I had never felt a Crucio that made me want to die until the one he cast on me shortly after I arrived. Can't say that I would have survived two, either. Was Harry still angry after I left? I think he's affecting the Dark Lord as much as the Dark Lord affects him..."

"The Cub wasn't visibly angry, no, but that doesn't mean anything," Remus murmured in reply. "He smelled angry for most of the day after he looked at that genealogy parchment, which I still haven't had the chance to see, by the by. Visiting Ollivander for his new wand calmed him down a lot and he was fine until the Death Eaters showed up in the Alley."

"Then he lost it...didn't he." There was no doubt in the Slytherin's voice. "Voldemort lost it not long before he sent me home. It was a very unpleasant wake up call, Remus, my friend. If that rage was anything close to what Harry was really feeling..."

"He scared the hell out of me, Severus! He fought Bellatrix Lestrange into a fucking stand still and then snapped and snarled about her running away when he wasn't done with her yet...he's in the training room working it off now..."

"It sounds like Bella finally did something smart. You do realize that Harry and the Dark Lord are the only two people to ever send her running to get out of a duel alive, yes?"

"I didn't know that," the werewolf mused quietly. "It was a bloody mess, that duel...bloody beautiful to watch, though. I'll have to show

you the bit at Ollivander's and the duel in the Pensive later. Words simply will not describe everything that happened today. Diagon Alley is a great big disaster."

"That I can believe," Severus drawled sarcastically as the potions finished their work and left him feeling more angry and uncertain than physically hurt at that point. A resounding rumble filtered its way down the hall to their ears and he arched one eyebrow at the slightly amused werewolf. "What in Merlin's name was that?"

"A Reducto from the sound of it. The door had to have been open for us to hear it though, so I expect the Cub has calmed down enough to come and see how you're doing."

Exiting the training room with a final blasting curse, Harry checked in the dining room before wandering further down the hall to the sitting room that was just off the foyer. Seeing that Severus had returned while he was burning off some of his excess emotional energy and noting that he definitely looked a little worse for wear, he conjured a chair and sat forward with concern evident on his face through the remaining anger.

"He hurt you badly this time," he stated matter of factly. "And it was my fault. If I hadn't been so ruddy pissed off..."

"It wasn't your fault, Harry. You can't take responsibility for the Dark Lord not controlling his temper any better than he didn't today," Severus muttered. "He's had many more years of experience at it than you do."

"Not like this, he doesn't. In this, I have it over on him," Harry countered. "This is where I have a year of learned control more than he does. I let things get the better of me and he took it out on you...its okay that he'll take it out on Bella. I was actually counting on that." He smirked maliciously before sitting back in his chair, his anger clearly having been revived by the subject. "The bitch had no business running away from a perfectly good, unfinished duel...did you know she was such a coward, Severus? How did she look when she arrived? Did I actually manage to nail her at least one good time?"

Feeling the power around the younger wizard as it started to build in response to his negative emotions, Severus was forcefully reminded of his own recent torture session at the hands of the man connected rather intimately to the one he was sitting beside and reacted as much to protect himself as to diffuse the situation.

“You really should try to calm down, Harry. Letting his drives get the better of you isn’t going to make anything better...”

“You just don’t have what it takes to enjoy a good argument anymore,” Harry stated. “It’s okay. I understand. You’ve gotten old and you just can’t hack it. There’s a good pasture out back that we can let you go to seed in.”

“This isn’t about me, Harry. You need to calm down and think rationally about where these thoughts and emotions are coming from. Maybe you should work on your Occlumency for a little while...”

“So I should just bottle it up and be as pinched and emotionally constipated as you are?” Harry snorted and snapped at the older man when the one person he could count on to be verbally nasty and open for a verbal brawl simply refused to take the bait. He was tired of being handled like he was going to break and it was going to end now.

“Who are you and what the bloody hell have you done with Severus Snape!”

“What? Harry, you need to...”

“I want to fight and you won’t fucking fight. I didn’t like you the way you were before, but at least you had a spine. Were you always this weak willed? Are you going to pull a Lucius Malfoy and claim it was the Imperious that made you do it? Hell, you’re barely any better than Wormtail,” he sneered out nastily.

“You’re just being overly influenced by the Dark Lord right now, Harry...try to calm down...” Severus couldn’t believe this was happening – Harry had never truly confronted him before and now that he was trying so hard to repair the damaged relationship that

existed between them, the boy was pulling something that could very well destroy it permanently.

“If I was being overly fucking influenced by Tom, then both of you would already know what it feels like for me to Crucio your asses into insanity! Is that what you want me to do so I can prove to you how bad of an influence Tom is on me? You’re nothing but a spineless, masochistic, small minded little pervert who’s so afraid that people won’t like him if he admits that he likes to go to Dark Revels! Hell, it’s probably the only way you could ever get laid anyway!”

Sputtering, cheeks flushed in a mix of embarrassment and burgeoning anger, Severus growled at the teenager who was currently ripping into him like a razor tongued whirling dervish.

“Harry...”

“Oh, I get it, now...you won’t fight with me because I’m not a scared and defenceless eleven year old child any more. You’ve lost your bloody advantage now that I’m able to stand up for myself...you can’t run to Albus and whine about how useless I am and how Minerva obviously coddles her pet Gryffindor.” Harry smirked evilly.

If it were possible for steam to come out of Severus’ ears, it would have done so then. His eyes darkened to true black and he snarled at the offensive child who stood before him with his teeth bared in an open challenge to his authority over him.

Remus sat back and watched the pair go after each other, his eyes going wider and wider as Harry’s tactics became ever more venomous. Then Severus snapped and snarled at the teenager before retaliating in kind. Keeping a close eye on the rather viciously entertaining proceedings, he relaxed and contemplated getting some popped corn from one of the house elves.

“It’s about time that finally happened,” he murmured to himself. “I was beginning to think Severus would never recover after that letter...”

Laughing nastily, Harry shook his head at Severus and clucked his tongue.

"You are an outrageously backward sycophant and a feculent, blood-curdling offence to all who retain a shred of good taste and decency," he purred with an evil glint in his green, green eyes. "You are a dreadful, unsightly fiend and a malingering, flesh-creeping cause of wailing and gnashing of teeth."

"I'm sorry. I don't speak ignoramus. Can you get someone to translate whatever you just said into meaningful English before you try again? You should offer your oratorical style to muggle hospital operating theatres as a highly-effective alternative to unconsciousness-inducing medications," Severus snapped out with an equally mean smirk. "Clearly, the full expanse of your ignorance is not yet mapped. If you had any concept of that which you are speaking, you might actually prove to be dangerous."

"Maybe you wouldn't come across as such a jellyfish-sucking mental midget if you weren't afflicted with an overly large case of inflated self-importance," the teen growled out. "Clearly, you have lost your fingertip grip on reality and have descended into an abyss of irreversible lunacy. Only that could explain why you insist on thinking that your opinion holds any value to someone other than yourself!"

"Your speech is a tedious stream of babble which amounts to nothing more than the demented cacophony of a drugged lunatic banging loudly on kitchen pots and pans. How about putting that into proper syntax, form, and grammar so that I can at least understand what you are saying before I dismiss it out of hand?" the potions master snapped back.

Bored with the back and forth sharing of insults to their intelligence and ability to string together coherent thoughts, Harry changed tactics abruptly. He wanted this argument to burn and he was going to get his burn no matter what he had to say to get it.

"Maybe you liked it when we were all eleven year old school children...I never did pay attention to what you went after at the Revels and I've certainly never seen you pick a fight with anyone much older than twelve..."

“How DARE you stand there and call me a paedophile you barely developed excuse for a human being! What would you know of my sexual habits when the best you can do is say you know your own hand intimately well! Oh, please do forgive me...you know the Dark Lord rather intimately well, don't you. Perhaps you two have more going on in these meetings of yours than talking and annoying each other...or is that just your own personal euphemism for getting fucked by a seventy year old, snake faced, twisted, sick and disgusting pervert?”

Pausing to draw breath, Severus didn't catch the fire that was starting to rage in the teen's green eyes as he opened his mouth and continued his diatribe.

“You're nothing but a dirty-kneed boy toy for an old man that has twisted you into the mirror image of his own sixteen year old self! Do you call him Tom when he fucks you in your own mind or do you call him 'Daddy'?” Severus suddenly caught on to the fact that he just hit a potentially sore and nasty subject that bore later consideration when he actually saw Harry's eyes flare to Avada Kedavra green with rage. The teen started to raise a bone white wand he'd never seen before and there was no mistaking the threat in that action.

Harry raised his wand to snarl out a curse, his thoughts hazed by the red rage the potions master's words inspired. Severus attacked again verbally and he slowly lowered his wand, but the hate filled snarl took a good bit longer to fall from his face.

No matter how enraged he was, Severus knew he didn't dare let this fight escalate beyond words. Snapping out another round of insulting words aimed at redirecting the situation, he didn't let himself relax back into the argument until that wand was back in its holster.

“Oh, that's right. Turn this into a duel because you don't have the mind for anything else. Weak at potions, weak at your school work. All you have is power, meagre though it is! You're nothing but a weak willed, easily manipulated, miserable little boy! Does Granger have to do all of your thinking for you? Could you even get through a day without her leading you about and telling you how to manage it?”

Grinning like a maniac, Harry let the newest rush of insults flow over him like the lyrics of a fondly remembered song before retaliating with one of his own. As angry as he was, this was the Severus Snape he had grown to prefer and it was a good thing to have him back.

“You’re nothing but a jealous, power hungry sycophant who’ll bend his knee to whomever happens to be the most powerful person around,” he snarled out while still grinning his delight. “You lust for what you’ll never have, so you whore yourself out to those who do. Tell me, do you and Lucius work together or is he the only one who’ll be getting knee pads and mouthwash for Christmas?”

“Why ask me, you insolent little monster? You’re the one the Dark Lord is so bloody fascinated by,” Severus purred meanly. “Is that what he’ll be sending you for Christmas, hmm? Presents for his little Gryffindor catamite?”

Laughing harshly, Harry advanced into the older man’s personal space with a lewd and lascivious leer that raised the hair on the back of both Remus and Severus’ necks.

“I wouldn’t be the one with a cock in my mouth or any other orifice for that matter. Try again,” Harry purred back, everything about his tone and posture reeking of confident, thoroughly self assured power.

Unable to stand it anymore, Severus took a step back from Harry’s looming presence and attacked about that damnable, annoying grin since he didn’t quite know how to respond to the teen’s last disconcerting, arrogant and rather thought provoking jab.

“What the bloody hell are you smiling about, you brainless wretch!”

“It’s good to have you back, Severus.” Harry’s grin grew as the potions master stood in stunned silence and stared at him with his mouth opening and closing uselessly.

Unable to process the sudden change of mood on the part of the younger wizard, Severus stood in stunned silence, his mouth working as he tried to formulate a response. Finally recovering some of his verbal faculties, he responded.

"Brat," he snapped.

"I care about you too, you snarky bastard. Now c'mon. It's been a long bloody day and I'm hungry." Harry turned and led the way to the dining room. Severus brushed past him on the way in, bouncing him off the doorjamb with a rather painful result that drew a hiss from him. "Bastard."

Severus just smirked and sat down at the table. Any Slytherin worth their salt would never openly attack someone with a physical assault if they wanted to cause them pain. That was not nearly subtle enough for their tastes. They would simply encourage the offender into a situation that would force them to cause themselves a great deal more pain.

"If you hadn't been in my way, it wouldn't have hurt," he drawled out in a very self-satisfied tone.

"Uh-huh. Sure. You were just trying to get even and I'm okay with that. I out Slytherined you and you can't deal with it," Harry taunted playfully.

August 3rd, Unplottable Location

6:40 P.M.

Recognizing the familiar surroundings of her Lord's audience chamber, Bellatrix slumped to the floor and panted heavily, her breathing loudly audible until the dying death eaters arrived. Slowly levering herself up, she froze when she saw Voldemort lounging on his throne. Lowering her head in shame, she crawled to him and kissed the hem of his robes.

"My Lord..."

"Since you are back in barely eight minutes when I expected you to be gone for over fifteen and I see that you have lost six, no seven of your number, I feel safe in assuming that things did not go according to plan," Voldemort drawled lazily, the volatile nature of his anger

more evident because of the lack of obvious interest in his tone. "I take it you encountered a significant force of Aurors?"

"No, my Lord...we would have fared better had it been Aurors," Bellatrix admitted unhappily. "It was one young man I did not recognize at first...it was the Potter boy, my Lord. He has grown powerful...much of the alley was destroyed around us just from rebounding..."

"How do you know it was him? Surely he wasn't too much for you to handle, my darling Bella..." Voldemort taunted the defeated woman even as he sought more information on what he knew to be the truth. This definitely bore further investigation.

"Parseltongue, my Lord...he cast using Parseltongue, something I've only seen you do...he cast the

rotting curse..."

"He did, did he now..." Voldemort purred and approached the still screaming man. Smirking over the piercing, desperate quality of the man's tortured screams, he observed the rapidly progressing effects on the unfortunate Death Eater and wondered just how his little serpent had learned this particular spell. To his knowledge, no one but he, him self, could have taught it to Harry and he knew that he had not done so.

"It would seem that young Harry Potter has finally found his fangs. Good. Now things will become more interesting for all of us." A lazily spoken Avada Kedavra ended the man's screams permanently. "I would suggest you all brush up on your skills if this is what you will be facing. Oh, and Bella? Do not fail me again."

He turned his wand on her and whispered a spell almost lovingly.

"Crucio."

TRANSLATIONS

muukuugaal sheklac- honoured chieftain in goblin

August 3rd, Unplottable Location

"I would suggest you all brush up on your skills if this is what you will be facing. Oh, and Bella? Do not fail me again."

He turned his wand on her and whispered a spell almost lovingly.

"Crucio."

Thrashing and screaming on the floor for a surprisingly short period of time, Bellatrix shakily forced herself back into a kneeling position and bowed her head as shame filled her being. She had let a sixteen year old boy with a fraction of her experience best her in a full out duel. Bellatrix Lestrange had failed her Master and she knew that she deserved whatever punishment he chose to bestow upon her.

Watching the penitent woman move to kneel before him yet again, Voldemort's lips curled up in an open expression of disappointment and barely veiled disgust.

"Look at me, Bella. I want your memory of the duel."

Looking up obediently despite, or perhaps because of the pain she knew the Dark Lord would inflict during his use of Legilimency, Bellatrix focused on the memory in question so that it would be the first thing in her thoughts. Flinching visibly when the angry presence that was the Dark Lord filled her mind, she did her best to remain quiet as he pulled up several other memories as well.

Pulling the memory of the recent duel up with practiced ease, Voldemort viewed it rapidly and set it aside for later consideration. Moving on to Bella's memories of her brief scuffles with Harry at the Ministry, he repeated the process of viewing and setting aside the images.

His little Serpent seemed to have rather abruptly grown fangs and the instinctual response to bite whatever bothered him at the time. Voldemort was curious if the events in Diagon Alley were the first actual manifestations of this darker edge to his little Serpent's personality or if the signs had been available for some time, had any

one bothered to look. It's about time I bothered to look, he mused. It's past time.

Making sure he had all of the memories he wished to go over more thoroughly, Voldemort withdrew from the woman's mind and smirked viciously.

"Leave my sight, all of you! Oh, and Bella...when next you gather my new Death Eaters for training, you will all be training with me."

August 3rd, Office of Amelia Bones, Department of Magical Law Enforcement

Settling back in her seat with a low groan, Amelia Bones set her monocle on the desk and rubbed at her eyes while she contemplated what she knew of the day's unprecedented events even as her mind offered up images of the destruction that had occurred in that small section of Diagon Alley.

"The Death Eaters apparated in," she mused aloud and could almost see the frantic crowds as they tried to escape the black robed bogey men. "An unknown wizard ordered what must have been a retainer to get people under cover while he advanced to openly challenge Bellatrix Lestrange as if he knew her personally."

Frowning over what she had just said, Amelia replaced her monocle and picked up the transcripts of the witness interviews. Skimming through, she paused and reread one account before nodding.

"Our nameless wizard called her by name and taunted her after his opening attack, so he had to know her somehow, whether personally or indirectly. The first few salvo's were relatively calm on his part, being composed mostly of Reductos and a few more advanced spells until she returned the taunting and seemed to anger him with something she said, at which point they traded shots with equal viciousness." Amelia read through some of the other accounts again and shuddered. "Equal only in the nature of the spells; from the looks of things she was facing someone who was clearly way out of her league, resulting in her panicked flight."

Marvelling over the buoyant mood of many of the witnesses given their close scrapes with death, she came to one clear conclusion. This wizard's bold and fearless attack on one of the most feared Death Eaters alive had given the people a renewed attitude of hope they hadn't shown since the news of Voldemort's return had been announced.

"No bystander deaths...copious collateral damage...well, which would you rather have, old girl? Broken buildings and living people or dead people and pristine buildings?" Amelia had to admit that the deadly focus of the attacking wizard seemed to have kept the Death Eaters so thoroughly focused on him that they never had a chance to get up to their usual mischief and all but one of the buildings would be repaired in a matter of days. Magic was a beautiful thing. "Who are you? I haven't seen anyone duel like that since Albus Dumbledore and Voldemort..."

Thinking about the Pensive memory she had seen of the duel between Albus and Voldemort in the atrium, Amelia wondered what would have happened if Albus had been the one duelling Bellatrix as he duelled now and shuddered. She somehow doubted they would have had so few bystander injuries since the other Death Eaters might have felt less cowed, allowing them the freedom to continue their mischief and mayhem around the duelling pair.

"You weren't always so restrained, Albus. I remember when you duelled against Grindelwald and that was one of the wildest, most unrestrained duels I've ever seen," she mused and thought on how the older wizard had changed over the years from a bright, charismatic and attractively powerful man into the still intensely charismatic and powerful, but manipulative and secretive man he was today. Thinking along those lines led her to a recollection of the day she had been invited to join a 'greater' cause.

- - - Flashback - - -

Settling herself in a seat across from Albus, Amelia arched an eyebrow at him and smiled a little.

“What was it you wanted to talk to me about, Headmaster Dumbledore?”

“You’re a strong and intelligent woman, Amelia, and one who is in a prominent position to make a difference in the war against Voldemort. I have a proposal for you that could make your position even stronger,” Albus replied with a smile, eyes twinkling merrily.

“I’m listening,” Amelia stated even as she adjusted her monocle and resisted the urge to frown suspiciously. She didn’t know why she didn’t like the sound of this, but something in her gut told her it wouldn’t sit very well.

“With proper guidance the wizarding world could become an ideal home for all of us, Amelia. Right now, that guidance is weak and has been corrupted by violence and greed,” Albus began. “I want to help make our world better, to help make it into an ideal environment for our people to grow and be happy in. There is one group devoted to the cause of ushering this Golden Age in to being for the wizarding world, a group solidly in opposition to Voldemort and his violent and dark ideas of change and conquest.”

“What group would that be?” Just hearing Dumbledore speak in such an impassioned way about this ideal society where everyone would be happy and peaceful made Amelia nervous. Several groups had attempted some form of Utopian society over time and none of them had ever been more than marginally successful. In her opinion, humans simply weren’t cut out for perfect peace – they fought tooth and nail for everything they achieved as if it were intrinsically tied in with their need to breathe. They would begin to stagnate and die in such a controlled environment...until Dark Lord after Dark Lord rose to give the people the strife and external motivation they required. She swallowed carefully and continued to give Albus her full attention despite her misgivings.

“The Order of the Phoenix is the name of the group I am referring to. I want to invite you to join our ranks, Amelia. I invite you to help me, to help us, in our quest to make our world a safe and perfect one for our children. Surely you would want that for your self; wouldn’t you want that safety and sense of security for Susan? Surely you want your

niece to be able to live without fear,” Albus murmured softly and cajolingly.

Feeling herself being lulled and warmed by that seductive tone and the power that was laced through it like an intoxicatingly strong whiskey, Amelia steeled herself against the uninvited intrusion and frowned when that comforting feeling faded away as her mental shields re-asserted them selves.

“I will have to think on it, Headmaster Dumbledore. Given my position in the Ministry, such things cannot be taken lightly,” Amelia replied and stood. “I appreciate your hospitality, but I must return to my duties.”

- - - End Flashback - - -

Rubbing her arms as a bone deep chill filled her, Amelia shook her head.

“Dark Lord after Dark Lord...we’ve had three in less than 60 years if you count Riddle separately from Voldemort...and now there’s this new wizard...” Based on the accounts she had read, she was only too aware that this man’s respect for life might very well not be limitless given how badly he had hurt the Death Eaters that had managed to target him. What would have happened if the bystanders had targeted him as well? Somehow she didn’t think things would have turned out nearly so well. Sighing sharply, she growled and really wished the masked bastards hadn’t all had emergency port keys presumably keyed to Bellatrix’s.

A quiet knock pulled her from her irritated contemplation and she sighed.

“What is it?”

Angela poked her head into the Director’s office and smiled at the frazzled older woman.

“This just came for you, Director. I think the Prophet is a little leery of messing up on this one,” the young witch stated with a smirk. “The delivery boy was so nervous I could have scared him to death.”

Smiling a little despite her mood, Amelia beckoned her secretary in and sighed when she saw what had to be a proof copy of the Daily Prophet’s most recent edition.

“A proof copy? You may be right on with that assessment, Angela. Thank you. Has anything further come in from the investigations going on in Diagon Alley?”

“Nothing new so far, Director. Would you like some tea? It might be a long night...”

“Tea sounds lovely, dear. Thank you.” Amelia opened the newspaper and the very first thing she saw was a picture taken from behind the wizard who had attacked Bellatrix. It showed him practically looming over her, bone white wand aimed at the terrified woman who lay cringing on the ground at his feet. Savouring the fear on the evil woman’s face, Amelia felt a twinge of guilt shoot through the elation this picture inspired; could she really gloat over seeing anyone, even Lestrage brought so low? Smirking a little she decided that, yes, she most certainly could gloat over such a thing and sat back to enjoy the hope and freedom that image made her feel.

“Oh, the people are going to eat this up,” she breathed. “Who of us thought we would ever get to see that mad woman afraid of anyone?” Still smiling a little bit, Amelia focused on the first article and was surprised at how non-confrontational it was. “I see what Angela meant...it’s possible that they are afraid of making whoever he is mad at them, so they reined themselves in...good show. Good show, indeed.” Reading on, she relaxed some and settled in to wait for further information from her investigative teams.

August 4th, The Daily Prophet – Front Page Special Morning Edition

A NEW REASON FOR HOPE?

As the photo above demonstrates, there is no one who cannot be beaten in a duel – no one who cannot be made to feel fear for their life. Whom ever this wizard is, whether he be Light or Dark, we owe him a great deal of thanks for the deaths of nearly a dozen Death Eaters and the resounding demonstration that Bellatrix Lestrange is not without weakness.

Diagon Alley took a great deal of damage during the fast and furious duel that took place there today just as the sun was setting, but the damage was almost entirely collateral. Only five individuals were injured seriously enough to be taken to St. Mungo's for treatment and of those, only two were serious enough to require an overnight stay.

Though the damage to Diagon Alley was appalling it can be repaired in a matter of days. Lives cannot be replaced. Thank you, who ever you are, regardless of your personal motivations. Today this reporter saw a reason to hope that this war will eventually come to an end with something of our society left intact.

Do not be fooled my fellow Wizards and Witches. This is but the beginning of a new era and we must change to meet it! Today proved to me as nothing else ever could have that we must fight for what we believe in and to protect those we love. Do not sit idly by and wait for someone to save you. We must save our selves if we are to survive this new war.

By

Reginald McKinnon

RIVAL DARK LORD OR VIGILANTE JUSTICE?

Just barely an hour ago, this reporter witnessed one of the most terrifyingly destructive duels of current times. Over a dozen Death Eaters apparated into Diagon Alley near Gringotts Bank and barely got a spell off before a mysterious, black cloaked and hooded wizard directly challenged Bellatrix Lestrange to a duel and proceeded to attack her without mercy.

Many store fronts were damaged terribly or destroyed completely as spells flew every which way and rebounded from the combatant's shields. It must be stated that this duel became so violent that the rest of the Death Eaters – those who were alive and well enough to do so – took cover to save their own cowardly skins. Bellatrix Lestrange fled from this unknown wizard, her fear as clear as day on her face.

Who was this new wizard to make You Know Who's left hand woman cower in fear for her life? Was this a personal vendetta against Lestrange alone or was there another motive? Only time will tell and this reporter intends to find out. Until then, we can all only hope that the light has a new Champion against evil.

By

Rita Skeeter

August 3rd, Snape Manor

Picking up the tightly rolled piece of parchment that Harry had laid on the kitchen table once he had calmed down enough to be truly conversational again, Remus eyed the younger wizard a little more cautiously than usual.

"Whatever is on this parchment really set you off earlier today while we were at Gringotts. Are you sure you want to get into it now?"

"I need to know what really happened to lead up to what you'll find on that parchment," Harry stated calmly. "I'm going to go to the library and read and you two can do what ever you want to try and figure it out. It's not something I want to deal with right now, so please leave me out of it until tomorrow at the earliest." With that statement made, he turned on his heel and left the dining room in a swirl of billowing robes.

"That was just strange," Severus observed dryly. "Has he had this attitude all along or was I too blinded by my own need for atonement to notice?"

"Hmm? Part of it he had from the time we brought him here and yes, I think you were blind to it most of the time," the werewolf mused and unrolled the genealogy onto the table so they could both go over it at the same time. "This...almost arrogant presence, though? That appeared rather abruptly just before his duel with Bellatrix and it has been fading since you two fought it out, but..."

"But it's still clearly noticeable," Severus finished for Remus. Leaning over the parchment with the werewolf, he traced the Potter line back to Gryffindor with ease. "Well, he was right when he said nothing looks out of the ordinary on the Potter side," he mused.

"It isn't the Potter side that set him off though." Remus drew the spy's gaze to the Evan's line and traced it up, only to stop a generation back and circle his finger between two names. "Ambrosius Reginald Evans...the very late Lord Evans that Harry said was actually Lord Grindelwald and Tom Marvolo Riddle..."

"The Dark Lord is his grandfather and Grindelwald is his great grandfather..." Severus pulled out a chair and sat down slowly as the potential ramifications of that kind of family history hit him like a ton of bricks. Many characteristics tended to follow family lines and Harry's maternal line of descent was full of Dark Lords.

"What do you really think are the odds that Lily's mother had consensual relations with Tom Riddle?"

"I don't think it's very likely at all, but he always could be a charming and seductive bastard when he wanted to be, or so I have been told, in any case..." Remus shook his head and nudged Severus. "You fell for the bait at one time yourself."

"Yes, but for power, not for sex," Severus pointed out. "I don't know if he ever had any lovers on the side that were anything more than a way for him to vent his frustrations and fill his physical needs...he's too possessive for something so casual as that...and she was Grindelwald's daughter...that would have been a major score for him if he knew who she was."

"A major score...yes, she would have been that," Remus admitted. "Look at Lily...she was beautiful and strong. If her mother was anything like her on top of being the child of the late Dark Lord, then I fully agree. So, how do we go about getting the information that Harry is requesting?"

"We can't very well just go walk into St. Mungo's and the Ministry and ask for it," Severus declared. "And with Albus looking for you, you couldn't do it anyway."

"We can't as things stand right now, no...and I agree about my need to not show my face publicly for the time being." Remus grinned. "As it stands, I need to check on something, but if I'm right, it wouldn't put either of us in any more of a pickle than we're already in thanks to the ritual vows and it would give us the legal authority to get information and set things up on Harry's request..."

"I'm not going to like this, am I, Wolf?" Severus asked with a thunderous scowl.

"I don't know. You might. You might not...but how do you like the sound of Steward Snape and Chamberlain Lupin?" Remus grinned wolfishly.

Severus sat back further in his seat and eyed Remus for several long moments before his face took on a considering, calculating expression that soon turned into a smirk.

"You're talking about the old Retainer Oath, aren't you?"

"Yes, I am. I'm going to look into it before I formally propose it to Harry. I want to make sure it isn't going to make things worse instead of better in a twisted way..." The werewolf laughed a little. "I'm not sure how I'm managing to handle one master, as it were. How do you manage with three very powerful Masters who all think they have your complete loyalty?"

"Three?" Severus snorted. "I only have one Master and he scares the hell out of me lately. The Dark Lord and Albus...I can predict what

they're going to do and they are definitely not my masters no matter how much they would like to think so..."

"What brought you to this realization?" Remus asked, his amber eyes bright with curiosity. The spy seemed a great deal more relaxed and settled since his verbal battle with Harry and he wondered if this epiphany had occurred during that same battle of wills.

"I remembered my vow while we were fighting...right about the time he started to turn that new wand of his on me." The potions master eyed Remus intently. "I could feel the bloody wave of power rising right along with his hand...what the hell is that thing made of? He'd have killed me in the mood he was in..."

"That was probably the one time during your spat that I got worried," Remus admitted and then sat up straighter, eyes going wide as he recalled one of the things he was supposed to do. "Oh, bollocks, Fang! Yes, we definitely need to talk about that and you need to make anti-venom!"

"What are you going on about, Wolf?"

"Harry's new wand is made from the fang of that Basilisk he killed in second year. Ollivander said it will remain deadly for centuries, possibly permanently now that it is being used as a wand...So we need anti-venom in case one of us touches the wand accidentally or out of necessity...might not hurt to make one for Harry's blood, too," the werewolf mused as an afterthought. He all too clearly recalled the acrid scent of poison that filled the air whenever the teen had cut himself during the day's proceedings.

Severus swore he could feel the colour draining from his own face when Remus explained why they were going to need Basilisk anti-venom. A Basilisk fang wand?! How the bloody hell...

"He isn't affected by it?"

"Not a bit and even Ollivander was surprised by that. Didn't you notice that he handled it with his bare hands at Gringotts?" Remus asked with an arched eyebrow.

"I suppose I didn't think anything of it. He handled it like it was an ordinary plain piece of bone...and I honestly didn't think about the fang's potential properties since the beast it belonged to was already dead. We need to pull out my Pensive so you can show me what went on at Ollivander's and then duel in the Alley..." Visibly shaken, but recovering quickly, Severus focused on Remus with an intent stare. "He scared you, too, didn't he?" There was no doubt or question in Severus' tone when he made his statement.

"Merlin's balls, yes...I've never seen anything like that duel..."

"So give me a moment to fetch my Pensive and you can show me this incredible duel," Severus stated and hurried off to do just that.

Shaking his head, Remus groaned and shook his head. He was torn between wanting to see the duel again from a safe perspective with the input of an impartial observer and never wanting to see his cub cast those dark spells ever again. Composing himself, he focused himself on the two major events he wanted to share with the potions master so he could move them to the Pensive with greater ease.

"Are you sure you're up to this, Moony? We can wait..."

"No, it's alright. You need to know what went on and for all I know, you'll see something important that wouldn't mean anything to me."

"We'll see." Severus sat the enchanted bowl in front of Remus and then returned to his own seat. "Which memory will we be viewing first?"

"We'll view the two in order; first the wand making at Ollivander's, then the duel outside in the Alley. It's practically one continuous memory, anyway, so it will be easier to follow it that way." Taking a deep breath, Remus touched his wand to his temple and withdrew a silvery strand of luminescence which he then dropped into the Pensive. Looking into the swirling silver mist, the werewolf arched an eyebrow and raised his head to meet Severus' gaze. "Shall we? This is going to take a while."

Dropping into the memory as if from a great height, the two men took a moment to look around and relaxed into the familiar setting that was Ollivander's wand shop. They watched as Harry and Remus stepped into the shop and were greeted by Ollivander.

Turning his gaze to the tallest of the pair, Ollivander smiled slightly.

"I almost didn't recognize you, Mr. Potter. Holly and phoenix feather, eleven inches, nice and supple, superb for defence and charms and good for transfiguration. How is it serving you?"

Severus gestured to pause the memory play-back spell and shook his head at Moony.

"Ollivander almost didn't recognize him? That creepy old man recognizes everyone including the Dark Lord regardless of glamour charms and a change of body."

"I admit it does make one think now that I can view the conversation as an observer," the werewolf mused. "I wasn't aware of him being that different."

"Indeed," Severus mused and re-started the memory. Dark eyes following the interaction between Harry and Ollivander, the potions master had to chuckle a bit. "Ollivander does seem to like Harry, though."

"I think he does genuinely like him," Remus agreed and continued to observe.

"Ah, so you need a duelling wand, something you can pour some power into without the worry of damage to the wand itself." The silver eyed wand maker studied Harry intently before arching an eyebrow. "May I see your replacement wand? I'm curious what worked for you now that you seem to have outgrown your first wand."

Pulling the red lacquered wand out of its forearm holster, Harry laid it on the counter and watched Ollivander intently.

“Dobby found it in a bin of used wands at a junk shop in Knockturn Alley.”

“A junk shop?!” Ollivander threw the teen an indignant look while he studied the red wand. “What tragedy brought this beauty to such a lowly place...though in the end, it has found a worthy home...” He sighed.

“If memory serves me, which it rarely fails to do, then this is an Imperial wand,” Ollivander explained. “Given the quality and the fact that the core is an Imperial Dragon heartstring, I feel safe in guessing that it may have belonged to one of the Emperor’s during the Ming Dynasty.”

Severus half choked when Ollivander announced the wand’s origin.

“Ming Dynasty?! How the bloody hell..!?” Severus stared at Moony disbelievingly and then returned to watching.

“That’s what Ollivander said, Severus. I don’t know one way or the other and didn’t see a point in questioning the judgement of the creepy old man, as you so charmingly dubbed him.”

Shooting a sharp glance over at Remus, Severus shook his head and gave his focus back to the memory once more. Following the trio into the older wizard’s workroom, he looked around briefly before turning back to study the memory Harry and Ollivander.

“What do you want me to cast?” The raven haired teen twirled his wand between his fingers for a moment before settling into a relaxed looking duelling stance.

“Did you notice that, Moony? The way he twirled his wand through his fingers...”

“Yeah, so? He’s been doing that off and on at least since we snatched him up. What makes it so important?” Remus squeezed Severus shoulder gently and hoped the spy would relax some.

“The Dark Lord does that all the time when he’s thinking,” Severus replied and nodded to acknowledge Remus’ attempt at comfort. “I’ll be fine, Moony. It’s just a little disturbing to see how similar they are...especially now that He’s taking the restoration potions...”

Remus nodded and redirected Severus to watch Harry in the casting range. He couldn’t help but grin when that first reducto screamed down the length of the range and impacted against the wall with a dull rumble.

“Those aren’t supposed to be that bright. Every thing I cast with this wand seems to come out more powerful than I planned anyway, so maybe that’s what it is...”

Ollivander smiled encouragingly and nodded.

“A truly well matched wand will do that. Unfortunately this wand cannot handle your full capability, but go ahead and push a little. Let me get a feel for your magic.”

“Okay...how about a Patronus? That was one I could do with my old wand, so it might still work with this one.”

“That’s reasonable. Go ahead and try.”

A contented smile curved the teen’s lips and he raised his wand. Dropping it abruptly, Harry hissed angrily while shaking his obviously burned hand. He froze when Ollivander caught his hand between both of his own and whispered something under his breath.

“Yes, that first spell was just a Reducto,” Remus stated before Severus could even ask. “A low powered one according to his estimation.”

“He very nearly overloaded the wand by simply drawing up the magic for a Patronus? Morrigan...” Severus sighed explosively. “And then you tell him to cast it wandlessly?”

“He manages it magnificently. Watch. The show just gets better.”

The green-eyed teen relaxed visibly, smiled and cast with a sharp outward thrust of his hand. Light seemed to burst from his fingertips and Prongs formed up into stark detail. The Patronus trotted around the room briefly and then the large stag moved towards Harry with a disappointed sounding snort. Brushing past Ollivander with enough contact to rock the man back on his heels, Prongs nuzzled Harry's hand and faded away into nothingness.

Severus closed his mouth with an audible click and watched the young man wandlessly conjure a Patronus that physically shouldered Ollivander out of the way and made noise as its hooves hit the floor. Mouth falling open in a silent expression of fearful awe, he turned to look at Remus with a questioning look in his eyes.

"Yes, it was tangible, audible and damn near fully corporeal." Remus shivered. "It was hard to breathe when he cast that spell. Keep watching. The wand making is the most fascinating part."

"I will remember that. He looked so happy there for a little bit. I'm glad you were able to help distract him from what we now know was bothering him," Severus muttered and watched impassively until Ollivander handed Harry a narwhal horn wand. The boy's reaction was pricelessly funny and the dark eyed spy's laughter announced his opinion better than any words. "So much for the illusion that he's still a light wizard..."

"That was pretty funny, but I haven't given up on Harry being a Light wizard," the werewolf countered and ignored Severus' amused, almost pitying expression. "He looked at that wand like it had done something offensive and, as much as it takes getting used to, hearing him hissing at it just made it even more amusing."

"Next?" Harry asked with a wry laugh.

"Next we figure out what to use as the shaft of the new wand. Is there anything you feel a particular affinity towards?" Ollivander arched an eyebrow when Harry pulled a foot and a half long shaft of some white bone like material out of his robes and laid it on the work table. His hand hovered over it and his silvery eyes went wide.

“A very old basilisk...I feel phoenix here, in the clean area. Would you know anything about that?”

“Fawkes...so that’s how it got into my room,” Harry mused. “It was on my bed when I came out of the bathroom this morning and I thought that Dobby had brought it to me from the Chamber.”

“I think he’s getting used to having to tell some of his stories,” Remus mused. “It didn’t seem to make him quite as uncomfortable this time.”

“Or it simply didn’t bother him to tell Ollivander,” Severus speculated.

Contemplating the fang, then Harry, Ollivander nodded to himself before frowning a little.

“Very few cores will be compatible with this fang due to the reactivity of the venom. I will collect those that I have and see which one you react most favourably to.”

“Would it help if you had something to act as a balance? I have basilisk venom and phoenix tears in my blood and it’s the same venom as the basilisk that lost this fang.”

“He didn’t appear to have any idea what I was talking about at Gringotts when I said his blood smelled of poison, but here he is talking about the Basilisk venom and Phoenix tears in his blood like it’s something everyone has happen to them...” Remus frowned a little.

“Both reactions could be genuine...we’ll have to ask him and possibly even ask the Mind Healer. You’re right to wonder about it.”

“The freedom of flight, hatred and a desire for vengeance on the betrayer and love and loyalty to family; those are all very helpful and motivationally powerful emotions,” Ollivander murmured. “Given your affinity with serpents, that gives me a few ideas I might never have considered before.” He went to a large wardrobe and spoke so quietly they could barely hear what he said before the soft click of an opening lock was heard.

“What language is that?” Harry gave the wand maker a look crossed between confusion and intense concentration. “I can almost understand it...it feels like I should, but I can’t...”

Visibly surprised, Ollivander met Harry’s gaze and seemed to search for something before nodding slightly. He smiled a little.

“He feels so intensely about a great many things. No wonder he tends to swing from one extreme to the next,” Severus whispered. “And what was that with the language?”

“I don’t know for sure,” Remus admitted. “That’s another thing I meant to ask Harry about but there hasn’t been time. Keep watching. The next part is quite intriguing.”

“Give me a moment and I will lay the cores out on the work table. Kindly turn your back, as I do not want anything to interfere in your choice,” Ollivander instructed. “Keep your eyes closed and I will have Remus lead you over when I am ready for you to choose a core.” The wand maker pulled a double handful of different shaped and sized phials out of the heavily warded cupboard.

“Oh...what is that?” Eyes still closed, Harry turned back towards Ollivander and reached out to him. “It feels like flying...”

“How does the basilisk fang ‘feel’ to you, Harry?” Remus quirked a grin at Ollivander and nodded agreeably when the wand maker arched an eyebrow at him. “If something over there feels like flying, how does the fang feel?”

“Vengeance and pain,” Harry whispered in a harsh tone, face hardening for but a moment before that other feeling pulled at him again. “It must be a feather or a part of something that flies...it has to be to feel like this...”

“That narrows things down quite a bit,” Ollivander commented wryly and put away all but three of the phials. He looked down at what he held and focused on one vial before putting all but that one away. He closed the cupboard and slowly crossed the room towards the almost vibrating teenager. Placing a long, slender glass tube in Harry’s hand,

he took a step back and watched the relief flow over him as his body visibly relaxed.

Harry hissed something in Parseltongue and shivered while holding the vial like it was incredibly precious to him.

“What in the world is that?” Remus whispered, amber eyes a bit wide as he watched Harry commune with a clearly very magical feather.

“That is perhaps the rarest core material in my possession,” Ollivander replied just as quietly. “It is the feather of a nearly extinct South American winged serpent named the Kukulkan for the High Dragon it resembles. They are very magical, wickedly intelligent, deadly poisonous and a beautiful sight to see. I am not surprised by his choice now that I think about it.”

“Basilisk fang and Kukulkan feather?!” Severus practically squeaked in his shock. “Do you have any idea what I would give to have just one small feather from one of those snakes? That damnable Basilisk fang alone...” The potions master made a low, almost pain filled sound under his breath. “The potions I could make...”

“So talk to Harry. I’m sure he knows where the rest of the Basilisk is,” Remus pointed out with a burst of genuinely amused laughter. “I can’t help you with the feather, though.”

“I’ll do that,” Severus stated. “I will definitely be doing that.”

“Will this work with the fang?”

“Given the similar natures of both serpents, I believe so, but I would prefer to use your blood as a binder just in case there is a negative reaction. I only need a small vial full.” Conjuring the aforementioned vial, Ollivander pressed it to Harry’s offered arm and muttered a short spell under his breath; removing the vial that was now full of dark red blood and a swirling silvery luminescence, he took a step back to admire the contents much like Harry had done with the feather.

“My word, you were quite serious about the unusual properties of your blood, young man. Well, lets get your wand made, shall we? The difficult part is over – all you have to do now is watch.”

“And then he actually takes Harry’s blood to use in the wand? I’ve seen a lot of blood over the years and none of it looked like that...Merlin’s balls, Remus...I wouldn’t want to touch that wand even if I can make an antivenin. Unless the poison in Harry’s blood is actually still Basilisk, I may not be able to make a completely effective counter agent...I will do some tests and we shall see what can be done.”

“Are you...you are serious.” Remus shook his head. “Bloody hell...keep watching...this part is really neat.”

Shaking his head, the wand maker tuned his companions out and focused on the large fang that lay in front of him. Seemingly as an after thought, he pulled out his tape measure and gestured for Harry to stand.

“I can’t very well go by your old measurements, now can I?” The tape measure snaked out to measure the length of Harry’s arms and a few other seemingly meaningless measurements before coiling up in Ollivander’s hand, who then returned it to his pocket. “Excellent. Now I can begin.”

Remus sat forward beside his cub and watched with open fascination as power rolled out from the older wizard’s hands and shaped the fang into a decoratively designed grip and smooth shafted wand that gleamed dangerously in the candle light.

Nodding his satisfaction with the length of the actual wand and the shape of the grip after a final inspection of Harry’s wand hand, Ollivander poured the vial of blood over the smooth ivory and used his magic to force it into the hollow space inside. Pulling the Kukulcan feather from its vial with careful reverence, he laid it on the shaft of the wand and had barely begun to ‘push’ with his own power before it vanished into the core with a visible shimmer of discharged magic.

“How curious,” Ollivander mused and looked up at Harry. “But then, I tend to say things like that around you quite frequently, so why should now be any different, hmm? Basilisk fang and Kukulcan feather, fourteen and a half inches. This will be a superb wand for the Dark Arts, curses and hexes. Take up your wand, young man and go to the practice area before you so much as give it a wave. I dare say sparks are the very least of my expectations with this Master Work.”

Chuckling a little, eyes full of a dozen emotions, Severus shook his head and squeezed Remus’ shoulder firmly before sighing.

“A Master Work...a deadly dangerous one at that...I think the Dark Lord may not know what hit him if Harry uses that against him.”

“You might be right. The wand certainly reacted powerfully with his magic and, well, you’ll see what I mean once we get to the duel. What he does in here is just playing around.”

Harry strode over to the practice area, his aura rising around him like heat shimmer as he raised his wand to cast the first spell.

“There! That’s what happened when we were fighting!” Severus stared as just the act of preparing to use the fang wand brought his aura into view. “At least he wasn’t angry when he was testing it...”

Remus froze when a bright green spell was sent down the range, his face going pale and shocked. Then Harry laughed his delight and said the spell he’d used loudly enough for him to clearly hear it.

“Tersus Scaphium!”

Having just finished watching with open delight as Ollivander guided Harry through the process of making a custom wand; Severus almost wished he hadn’t missed the real event. If anything could have sealed his certainty on the issue, it was the look on Moony’s face when Harry first cast the pot cleaning spell.

“The Pot Cleaning spell...where the hell does he get these ideas?” Severus muttered with a slight smirk.

“He probably came up with it the same way Sirius would have...totally by accident, brat that he is,” Remus grumbled. “Ollivander loved it, though. He was so busy encouraging Harry to take the paint off the walls that I think he forgot that he’s supposed to be this reserved old man. Okay, now we come up on the point where things get crazy.”

“Make sure you break it in well, Mr. Potter. Your power and the wand must become well acquainted or it could prove to be a bit temperamental at times,” Ollivander reminded the currently smiling teen. “I’m not sure what spells you’d use to push your limits with it, but I wouldn’t be surprised if your mentors can’t come up with a few suggestions.”

“That statement wouldn’t bother me so much if I didn’t get the feeling that the Dark Lord is encouraging Harry to study things we wouldn’t let him within a hundred miles of,” Severus muttered sullenly.

“In other words, you group Voldemort in with us as one of Harry’s mentors?” Remus arched an eyebrow and paled a little when he thought about that. “That is a bit scary to contemplate...can we keep him in line?”

“We don’t stand a chance of it without help. You know Miss Granger and Miss Weasley are the ones who keep him in line,” the spy countered with a perfectly straight face.

“Ha ha,” Remus muttered and shook his head. Sadly, he didn’t think Severus was trying to be funny.

The calm of the previous few hours was shattered by the sharp sounds of multiple apparitions coming straight into the shopping crowds. Harry straightened abruptly, his aura appearing around him in its typical nearly invisible shimmers and he started to bark out orders at Remus.

“Death Eaters! Get as many people under cover as you can without getting yourself killed, Moony. I’ve got this.”

“Cub, damn it!”

Remus watched him self obey Harry's orders despite his desire to protect his Cub and realized that he had been compelled to do as he was told. He wasn't sure how he wound up back under Ollivander's wards, but he had to admit they were some of the most incredible magical constructs he had ever seen.

"His wards are incredible by the way. Almost nothing got through them."

"Did he just pull you out of the way of an Avada Kedavra?" Eyes wide, Severus stared at Remus after seeing the older wizard calmly reach out and pull Remus exactly far enough out of the way to avoid being hit by a jet of green light. "That was creepy, Moony."

"Uh-huh," Remus agreed. "Especially since I didn't notice that spell at the time...and he wasn't even looking in that direction..." Keenly aware of how dangerously close he had come to dying, the werewolf shuddered and rubbed his arms vigorously. "Damn..."

The angry resentment Harry had been swallowing down since he first saw his genealogical parchment flared into full flame and found a focus when his eyes lighted on the unmasked face of Bellatrix Lestranger.

Shifting into a looser, more open duelling stance, he growled under his breath and glanced over at the still scrambling werewolf.

Severus observed the moment Harry noticed Bellatrix and frowned. The teen had been in his classic, predictably text book duelling stance until that moment.

"He changed his stance...he's never done that before..."

"Reducto! Bella! Oh Bella!" Harry called out to her in a mocking, sing-song tone and advanced on the mad woman. His spell bounced off her shield spell but still managed to push her back a bit.

"Wh-Protego!" Defending herself against attack before she was consciously aware of its source, Bellatrix gestured sharply for the other Death Eaters to continue with their objective – mass, wanton

destruction. Grinning madly, she responded with an attack of her own and advanced on her opponent.

“Avada Kedavra! Crucio! Sectumsempra!”

“Look at the way he’s moving,” Severus muttered. “That swaying, disgustingly graceful way he’s dodging spells that should have hit him...”

“He moves like a snake,” Remus stated and then blinked when he realized exactly what he had just said. “Tell me what you’re seeing because I don’t have any real context to base it on.”

“The spells are fairly calm and basic so far, but he started moving like a seasoned duellist as soon as he spotted Bella. Now he’s moving like the Dark Lord would if he had Harry’s body. It’s quite disturbing...”

“Vomica Cruor!”

Harry avoided the majority of Bellatrix’s spells and yelped out his pain when the bone breaking hex grazed his left arm and shattered his humerus. Vision flaring to red as the rage and pain consumed him and kept him on his feet, he assessed his surroundings and renewed his own attack to give himself time to heal his arm while the enemy was recovering from their own wounds.

Remus shuddered when he heard Harry scream as if for the first time, but this time he also saw the moment that Harry stopped trying to win and set out to dominate, destroy and eventually kill his opponent.

“What am I seeing...what just happened to him?”

“I’m not sure and only Harry can truly explain it, but there’s his true aura,” Severus whispered quietly. “And there’s the most frightening sight I think I have ever seen short of being on the business end of the Dark Lord’s wand when he’s punishing someone for something.”

“Harry’s not using Crucio,” Remus protested.

“Neither does the Dark Lord when he is out to teach you a proper lesson in obedience and respect...” Severus shuddered when Harry began to toy with Bella, his attacks reducing her to a cowering, huddled form on the street. “If the Dark Lord tells you to draw your wand, you had best do it because refusing to fight him will only make it worse...and Merlin forbid you should manage to land a hit on him like she did when she hit Harry’s arm...”

“You’ve been through something like this, fighting Voldemort because he was angry with you?”

“It was before his defeat, during the first war...it only happened once and I never questioned another order...” The spy watched with rapt attention as Harry embraced his power and used it with a frightening level of skill and refined control, the green and black flames of his aura only increasing the sense of awe he felt.

“Here it comes,” Remus whispered. “This is what scared me more than anything else I’ve ever seen...”

Harry raised his bone white wand and aimed it directly at Bellatrix. He hissed out a spell and sickly yellowish-green energy coalesced around his hand and the wand it held before shooting out towards Bellatrix. It was clear that the mad woman recognized the spell when she broke her own attack and dove out of the way of the incoming spell.

Turning, Bellatrix risked a glance up as her closed her hand on something inside her robes. She met the gaze of her tormentor as he stalked towards her and cowered away from him. Pale and shaken, her fear clearly visible to any who could see her face just before she vanished, Bellatrix Lestrange ran from an opponent for the first time in recent memory.

“The Rotting Curse...I don’t know what it’s actually called since it’s a Parseltongue spell, but I’ve seen it used on people...it’s a slow and excruciatingly painful way to die if the screams are anything to go by...” Looking a little green, Severus swallowed carefully. “I’ve seen enough...”

'Falling' out of the Pensive, Severus sat and rocked in his seat for a few minutes before his colour finally began to return to it's usual and proper paleness and lost the faint green tinge that it had held at the end of the duel.

"I'm not sure he was even aware of what he was doing he was so angry and that's something we definitely have got to get him to work on controlling. If he lost it like that at Hogwarts..."

August 3rd, Snape Manor

Curious about how Harry had fared with his maturity and about the source of the intense anger that had been simmering and sparking through the younger wizard's moods for the better part of the entire day, Voldemort stepped through the doorway between their minds and looked around before calling out to the teen.

"Are you busy, my little Serpent?" Voldemort took a second, more detailed look around the Chamber that was his rival's inner core and shook his head. It had been changing gradually over the last few weeks and now it was truly a beautiful place of personal power. Gone were all of the blemishes that had marred it during previous visits, leaving behind the essentials of what Harry Potter truly was; unfortunately the Dark Lord still hadn't managed to completely figure out what those essentials were.

Aware of Tom the moment he stepped into his mind, Harry went to see what the older wizard wanted so he could send him on his way as quickly as possible. Despite his current and immediate resolution to let the past lie in the past, he wasn't very keen on spending the next few hours making polite conversation with someone he was still more than a little ticked off at.

"What do you want, Voldemort?"

The Dark Lord frowned. His little serpent had called him Tom ever since he had figured out who was talking to him in his mind, and though it had annoyed him at first, it had also become comfortable...he had liked the easy, almost friendly familiarity of being called by his birth name. To have Harry change their dynamic

now, to be able to feel him pull away and distance himself from the easy interaction they had been sharing disturbed him in a way he couldn't quite put into words.

"What has happened, my little Serpent? What has changed?" Green eyes stared at him and they were filled with a disturbing mixture of so many emotions that Voldemort couldn't quite figure out what Harry was feeling. Then Harry started to speak and he began to understand that a great deal more than Harry's magic and physical form had changed during his maturity.

"I've come to the realization that Fate must hate me very much, that or it hates us both with equal venom...I'm not a hundred percent sure which way that goes," Harry began in a tone of utter calm that belied the tumultuous nature of his emotions. "Why else would it insist on continuously throwing you and I into ever more convoluted and twisted situations that should inspire us to hate each other beyond words while still leaving us so intimately bound to each other's essence?"

Voldemort felt his body go cold at the fury that filled Harry's Avada Kedavra eyes and whipped the teen's magic into a wild frenzy. Why had it never occurred to him that there might be a very valid reason for the boy to have eyes the colour of Death? At that moment he was fairly certain he was looking at his own end and that to attempt to lie to or mislead the younger man at this particular moment in time would guarantee him the same slow and pain filled end that Harry had intended for Bella. "I'm not quite sure which specific situation you are referring to, my Serpent, but I cannot argue with the sentiment..."

"Oh, I'm referring to several situations, actually," Harry ground out. If he was going to have to deal with this can of worms now, then he was going to rip it wide open and get it all out in the open. How Tom responded would determine how he, Harry, chose to react later. "How about the night you raped my grandmother and got her pregnant? How about you finally decide to come clean with me about my Mother."

Taking a deep breath, Harry simply watched the older wizard before speaking yet again.

"While I was growing up, I hated living with the Dursleys, my so called Aunt and Uncle. I dreamed every day of having some sort of family besides them. Then I found out I was a Wizard and began to hope that I might have a magical family member who could take me in and save me from the Muggles who so clearly hated me for being a 'freak'. Fate was at least kind enough to spare me the unending disgust of actually being blood related to them," Harry stated venomously. "But then we come to the question of my actual blood relations, don't we Grandfather? Fate sure stepped in and shafted that dream, didn't it!"

"You were never meant to know that," Voldemort stated as calmly as possible despite the jumble his own emotions had been thrown into. "I knew that I had a daughter before she was even born and I ignored her existence because a female child could never be my Heir...I had no use for her...I did not know that Lily was that female child until I saw her again and looked into a face I never could forget."

"Angelique Evans," Harry whispered.

Voldemort simply nodded his agreement and continued speaking as if Harry had never interrupted him.

"I chose her because she was Grindelwald's only surviving child and the most powerful, strong willed woman I had ever encountered...she was so like Grindelwald in that way..." He shook his head. "She survived our little Revel because the Auror's interrupted us. Many years later Lily turned up as a most persistent and annoying thorn in my side and then the prophecy was delivered to me and I knew she had to be the one...her child would be the one to bring me low if I gave it the chance to grow up..."

Losing himself in his own thoughts, Harry was unaware of the sudden appearance of his aura and the way he had advanced on Tom in a storm of angry, swirling and thrashing power.

Seeing Harry's eyes go distant and introspective, Voldemort kept himself on alert but was still completely unprepared for the sudden assault of emotion driven power that drove him backwards for every step the younger wizard advanced. Shielding himself aggressively,

heels dug into keep from giving up more ground than he could absolutely help doing, the Dark Lord rode out the storm that was holding him locked in his bonded's mind.

Thanks to an intimate knowledge of Tom's memories, Harry was very well aware that family was not something the twisted man in front of him had ever spared a thought for but Harry also knew that Voldemort had thought twice before striking his own daughter down. He had been through both Tom's memories of that night and his own and they still made him frown with confused anger and hurt. It had always bothered him that his mother, fierce fighter that she was, chose to plead for mercy from a man who was publicly known for having absolutely no concept of what mercy was. Had she known that the beast who came to kill her and her family was her own blood or had she simply succumbed to the desperate need to protect her child at all costs? Did anyone else know of the rather sordid connection between the two rivals? He wondered as his most prominent memory of his parents played through his mind.

Lily, take Harry and go! It's him! Go! Run! I'll hold him off —"
The sounds of someone stumbling from a room — a door bursting open — a cackle of high-pitched laughter —

"Not Harry! Not Harry! Please — I'll do anything —"
"Stand aside — stand aside, girl —"

Why didn't she rain spells down on him the moment she heard him at the bedroom door? Harry could understand Tom taunting her...that was something anyone would have expected him to do, but why had he hesitated for even a moment before using lethal force? Why hadn't he just killed her outright instead of telling her to stand aside more than once? It seemed to be terribly out of character for the driven, power hungry man he had been and the cruel Dark Lord he had become.

Harry abruptly looked up and met Tom's gaze, his attention focusing his power on the source of his ire. Advancing until he had him pinned to the wall, Harry growled under his breath.

Pinned against the wall as much by Harry's power as by his searching gaze, Voldemort shook his head as if to clear it. When had he lost control of everything? When had this boy become such a formidable man, a power to be truly reckoned with? He knew the answer and that cold certainty made him pull up his own memory of the night he had first seen this fearsome force of will with an almost fearful hesitation. Reviewing it, he realized that he had acted with his usual brutal expediency until he had stood face to face, wand against wand, with the boy who should have been his heir, not his enemy. He had known who Harry was to him, who this irritating child was to him, and in his egotistical madness, had tried to kill him yet again.

Frowning fiercely, Voldemort met Harry's gaze and realized that his little Serpent still didn't hate him and that knowledge disturbed him even as it elated him. "How can you still not hate me after everything that has happened? I would have struck you down already if you had done to me a fraction of the things I have done to you..."

"Would you have been able to kill me, Tom? Do you hate me enough to kill me right now? Do you hate me at all?" Harry advanced in on the older man and met his red gaze with unflinching green. "Did you ever hate me or were you just going through the motions because you were supposed to hate me? Well, Tom?!"

"No," Voldemort whispered in reply and pressed himself harder against the wall. "I'm not completely certain I ever did hate you...I wanted to early on when you insisted on defying me at every turn and succeeded. I hated that a child could do this to me, could reduce me to nothing but a spectre and a memory used to frighten errant children into obedience...but I didn't hate the child..." He shook his head and stepped away from the wall, placing himself barely a foot away from Harry and let his own emotion driven magic join the frenzied maelstrom that was whipping around and through them. The ease with which their power meshed and merged around them was not lost on him. "I don't hate you, my little Serpent," he declared and vanished back into his own mind. He had much to think on.

Trembling in reaction to the seamless meshing of his power with Tom's and the emotional catharsis he had just willingly put himself through, Harry threw himself from his trance and collapsed into a

heap on the floor. Looking around at the destruction his magic had reeked on the sitting room he had secluded himself in, he shook his head in silent denial and coiled up into a tight ball when heaving, body shaking sobs broke free and escaped his mouth as primal, angry, pain filled cries.

Authors Note: Hello everyone! Sorry for the wait and for the shorter than usual chapter, but between work, life and my Muses, this is about all I have managed to actually pen out. Never fear – I am NOT going to stop writing on TSDW. I simply have five or six other projects that you will all be seeing in the near future. The most important point to this note, however, is that I am going to be participating in the NaNoWriMo challenge (National Novel Writing Month), so it will most likely be December before I post anything new on my stories. Whatever I write in November, be it Fan Fiction or an original work, will be posted on the appropriate sites and at my Yahoo group in December. Thank you all for your support, your reviews and the time you take to read my work. Cheers!

CHP11